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OR
THE STORY OF DIVINE
COMPASSION

BY
SHRI PURUSHOTTAMANANDA SWAMIJI
(VASISHTHA GUHA)

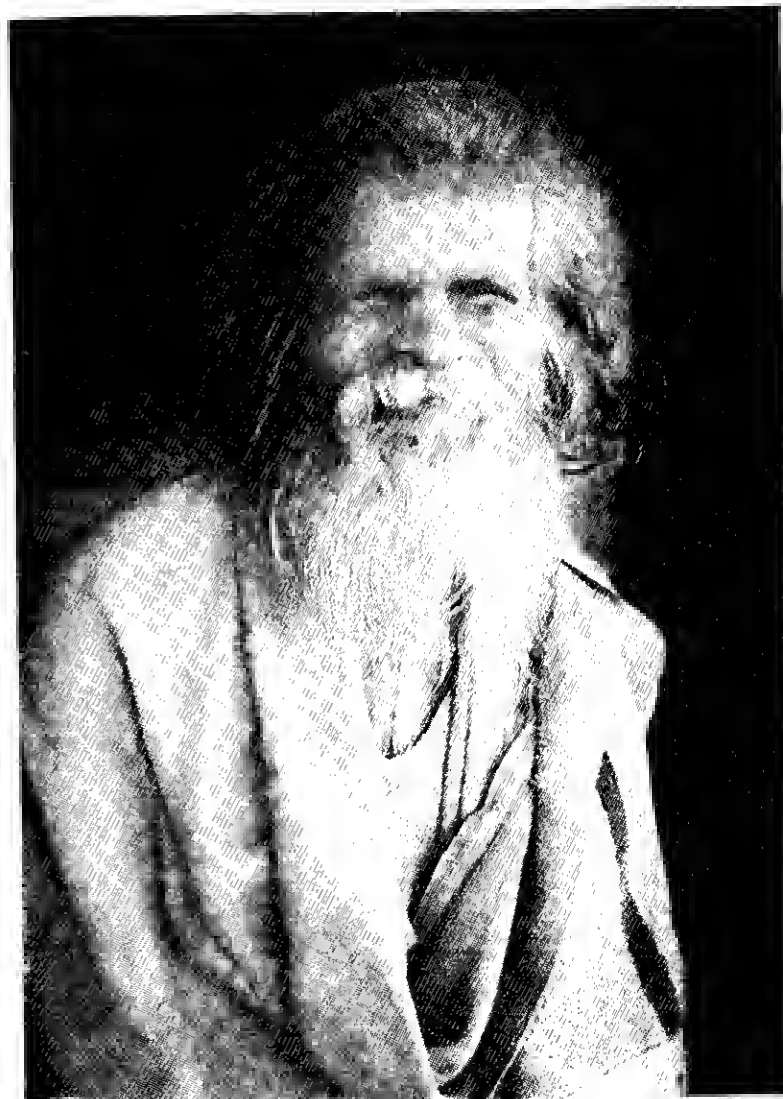
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Swami Purushottamananda Ji

*PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF
THE AUTO-BIOGRAPHY OF HIS HOLINESS
SWAMIJI PURUSHOTTAMANANDJI MAHARAJ OF
VASISHTHA GUHA, DIST. TEHRI-GARHWAL, U.P.
(HIMALAYAS)*

It is with a profound sense of inadequacy and humility that, after the publication of His Holiness Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj's Autobiography in Malayalam Language even during the Swamiji's life time, in 1956, it is only now, almost 38 years later, that it has been possible for Sri Purushottamananda Trust to place before the English-knowing public this English translation of the autobiography. Very shortly, the Trustees hope to bring out a Hindi version too, so that a much larger section of the Swamiji's devotees could read the great work and benefit from it.

Born in a middle-class house-hold in the town of Tiruvalla in Kerala State on Sunday, November 23, 1879, and given the name of Neelakantan, he was afflicted with rheumatism and paralysis even as he had just completed studies in the Fifth Form (equivalent to the present day 10th Standard) and had to discontinue his education and remain practically bed-ridden for about 5 years. Later, a friend introduced him to the Sri Ramakrishna Sangh in Tiruvalla where he began to participate in Bhajans, Kirtans, religious discourses etc and himself give readings from the Srimad

Bhagavatham. The year 1916 marked a turning point in his life when he was spell-bound by the darshan of Swami Nirmalanandaji of the Sri Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore (a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa) who had come to Haripad in Kerala. Nirmalanandaji exercised a profound influence on Nilakantan's life. In 1916, through his good offices, Nilakantan was given "Mantra Deeksha" at Haripad by Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, the then President of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math, Calcutta who had come down to Kerala. This was followed, in October 1923, by his initiation into Sanyasa, with the Sanyasa Ashram name of Purushottamananda Puri, by Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, the then President of Sri Ramakrishna Mission, during Nilakantan's visit to the Belur Math. Purushottamanandaji has vividly described, in his own words, his struggles during his childhood, his physical affliction, his spiritual leanings ever since childhood, how the Lord manifests His divine compassion at every twist and turn in life; how He fulfills His guarantee of "Yogakshemam Vahamyaham" if only we have the good sense to surrender ourselves completely to Him; his sojourn all over India; how he reached Vasishtha Guha in the Tehri-Garhwal District (Himalayas) of Uttar Pradesh, and lived there and identified himself with the Guha to the extent of his name becoming synonymous with the Guha; and how his spiritual life evolved itself from day to day.

Our whole life is a continuous spiritual Sadhana and the Guru Maharaj's autobiography affords immense opportunities for every reader and devotee to draw

heavily from the Swamiji's life. Devotees who had been fortunate and blessed enough to have come into contact with the Guru Maharaj during his life time (until his full Maha Samadhi on February 13, 1961), will find this autobiography kindling nostalgic memories. Others would find the reading of this great work eminently rewarding.

The Trustees place on record their appreciation for the dedication and devotion with which Shri J. Padmanabha Iyer carried out this English translation despite his impaired health.

The Trustees hope that every reader of this book will be able to get an idea of how, despite physical and other disabilities, a self-less life, a ready willingness to help one's fellow-creatures, a sense of total surrender to the Supreme, will enable each one of us to scale towering heights in our spiritual evolution. This book is accordingly dedicated to the memory of the Guru Maharaj whose boundless Blessings and Grace will be received by all his devotees.

For the Sri Purushottamananda Trust
Vasishtha Guha, U.P.
1994.

Swami Chaitanyananda

**PREFACE BY THE PUBLISHER OF THE
MALAYALAM EDITION (JULY 1956)
(ENGLISH TRANSLATION)**

Having retired from Government service, I decided that I should devote all the remaining time in my life towards the attainment of spiritual elevation and the fulfilment of the purpose of my existence and birth. One can attain such spiritual elevation through devotion to God, single-pointed contemplation, and unceasing effort. Possibly because of the effect of Vaasanas in the previous births, even in my youth, I could acquire a certain amount of real knowledge. Towards fulfilment of my ambition, I reached Kanyakumari and threw myself heart and soul in the worship (bhajana) of Sri Jagadambaa. After 3 - 4 years, I prepared myself for a pilgrimage to all the important temples and punya-tirthas in Bharatadesa. With the blessings of Providence, I could visit all the sacred temples and punya tirthas from Kanyakumari to Kailasa and from Sri Dvaaraka to Sri Puri Jagannath; particularly I was blessed to visit Manasa Sarovar and the great Sri Kailasa.

During my first pilgrimage in 1954, while in the Sivananda Ashram at Rishikesh, I came to know that the Vasishtha Guha of ancient days was only a little way from there; and that a great and noble sage had been staying there for 25 years, constantly engaged in sadhana-anushthana. So I reached Vasishtha Guha accompanied by a Tamilian Sanyasi. I prostrated before that divine Sage, with great devotion, attracted by his

child-like face, the divine effulgence emanating from him and the magnetic lustre of his face.

From the way in which we talked in Tamil language, he could readily understand that I hailed from Kerala; accordingly he continued the conversation with me in Malayalam. I gathered that the Purvashrama of that noble Sage was in Tiruvalla Taluk of Travancore State. I also became acquainted with a Bengali Brahmachari who was his disciple and was staying with him. That Brahmachari informed me that Swamiji was engaged in writing some books and that, particularly, because of the affectionate insistence of his devotees in India as well as abroad, he was now writing his auto-biography. We also had conversations with the Swamiji regarding his autobiography. He very kindly fulfilled my desire to go through the portions till then completed in manuscript. I apprised Swamiji that I had a desire to go on a pilgrimage of the Himalayas once again and visit Badrinath, Kedarnath and other sacred places; that if, with God's blessings, this ambition of mine got fulfilled in the near future, I would take that opportunity to call on the Swamiji again at that time; and that, if the manuscript of the autobiography became ready at that time, I myself would like to undertake the work of publishing it in book form. And, treating his sincerely uttered best wishes as the blessings of a great personage, I returned the next day itself.

I again embarked on a Himalayan pilgrimage, goaded by my inner self, in 1955. I went to Vasishtha

Guha and called on Swamiji. Seeing that, in addition to his spiritual practices, various social services which he had undertaken for helping the public, had also yielded excellent results, I felt considerably elated. Swamiji very kindly handed over to me the completed manuscript copy of his autobiography.

I reproduce below certain extracts from the book "To Badrinath" published in 1953 by Sri K.M.Munshi, Union Minister who, in his book, has recorded about the selfless services rendered by Swamiji to the public after getting to know about them first-hand.

"A few weeks previously while we were guests of the Rajmata of Tehri-Garhwal at Anand Kashi, I met a Sadhu who lived on the bank of the Ganga in a cave called Vasishtha Guha.

"When one morning we visited this natural retreat, we found hanging on the outer wall a portrait of Ramakrishna Paramahansa; the interior of the cave was dark and deep. A shrine of Shiva was installed there. An old Sadhu, frail, fragile, tiny, accompanied by his disciples, limped forward to meet us and began to talk in fairly fluent English. His name was Purushothamananda Puri.

"We met again in the afternoon and had a long talk. He told me his story. He originally came from Travancore and was initiated by one of the senior disciples of Sree Ramakrishna. After wandering for many years, he heard of a cave in the wilderness in

1928. So, with staff in hand and a blanket on his back, he limped his weary way to Vasishtha Guha, determined to meditate there in solitude.

"Another Sadhu, however, was in occupation of this cave and refused to share the cave with the newcomer. It is easy enough to leave the world; but very difficult to get rid of one thing, the sense of possession.

"But Purushothamanandaji was persistent; he refused to give up the idea, to live in the cave; he kept vigil outside it for a few days, and slept in the open. He had no food; he had no fire at which to warm himself. He remained in the wilderness trusting in God. "The ways of the Almighty are inscrutable", he said. "A villager gave six matches to light a fire with. A woman gave me some milk and so I managed to live".

"The original occupant of the cave eventually left it and went away. Our friend moved in and began to meditate.

"After a time, Purushothamanandaji went on a pilgrimage to Amarnath and did not return until six years later. He first cleared the cave of the silt which had been brought down by the river during the floods, and he once again settled down to meditate. People from surrounding villages flocked to see him, offered him food and afterwards became his disciples. He took a paternal interest in their welfare; helped them, advised them and induced them to build a high school in the

locality. He is now a man of considerable influence in the neighbourhood. Everyone honours and respects him.

"He is, I discovered, a deep Vedantin and his ways are simple, innocent, almost child-like; he smiles and smiles all the time. Loneliness, starvation and a hundred other aches mean nothing to him; he lives a real life, possessed of God, which give him perpetual Joy and Peace. He has come to this state after years of Sadhana.

"Before we parted, he admonished me. He asked, had I not had enough of life? It was high time I realised what I really was. "I wish I could," "I replied". (Then follows a Malayalam translation of the above extract in English).

Conferment of birth as a human being is itself the result of divine compassion. The charioteer who steers us on the right path in life is also the Supreme God. Those human beings who are able to think on these lines without the least trace of ego or arrogance; who, keeping a steady mud in prosperity as well as in adversity, in joy as well as in misery, are able to contemplate and meditate on that Supreme Effulgence with sincere devotion; and who serve Him with their whole body and mind, experience this bliss of good deeds on an ever-increasing scale. The autobiography of the author, the adorable Sri Purushottamanandaji, amply illustrates how God leads a person to Himself — a person who by virtue of good deeds done in prior births, has been born with a good, true and sincere heart and conduct; how God gives such a person either

fulfilment of his desires or miseries in order to bring him close to him. To such of those as wish to tread a similar path of self-realisation, there is no doubt that this autobiography will help in showing them the way. Known for his innocence and simplicity right from childhood, what the venerable Swamiji has recorded with his child-like simplicity, is published here in print exactly as it was written by him, for the benefit of countless readers.

PUBLISHER



DEDICATION

It was in the Valia Kottaaran (Big Palace) near the Subramania Temple at Haripad (Kerala State) that I was fortunate to have my very first darshan of Shri Nirmalananda Swamiji. Attracted by the magnetic spell of that divine person's eyes and drawn towards him, I gently walked up to him and was fortunate to repose my head in that lap, I had, in effect, offered my very body there. It is my firm belief that, even now, that head continues to repose there itself. I dedicate this Autobiography too at the Lotus Feet of that great person with reverence and devotion.

VASISHTHA GUHA

PURUSHOTTAMANANDA

19-09-1955

OBEISANCE TO THE PRECEPTORS

Many have been desirous of knowing about the life-story of this humble soul, but I was not very keen to spend time writing about the trivialities concerning my life. However, on the present occasion of my sojourn to Kerala when almost everyone who met me expressed a desire to know more about me, I happened to tell them: "I shall endeavour to place my life-story before you ere long". I am embarking on writing my autobiography with the sole object of ensuring that this assurance of mine does not remain unfulfilled.

MY FAMILY

2. You would certainly have heard of the erstwhile Travancore State which was also referred to by such endearing and praise-worthy names as Sri Vanchi Rajyam, Sree Vaazhumcode, Venaad, Dharma Rajyam etc. [Travancore State is presently part of Kerala State in the extreme south of India-Translator]. Our former administrators used to refer to this princely State as "The Star of India". Travancore is a breath-takingly beautiful country and its rulers — the Maharajas — used to govern it with deep and abiding affection for their people whom they considered to be not merely their subjects but as their own children. Travancore is a country which is lavishly endowed by nature — lofty, ever-green mountains, numerous rivers carrying pure water and providing navigation for steam-boats and

country craft; vast and enchanting natural lakes; forests abounding in myriads of wild animals and numerous species of trees; variegated flora and fauna; hundreds of ancient and hoary temples, churches, educational institutions; courts of law; roads and highways; railway lines and tunnels — these and many other ornaments adorn this beautiful land. One can say that persons who do not know to read and write practically do not exist here. Situated in the central part of Travancore is the taluk of Tiruvalla [Districts and taluks have, in some cases, undergone changes in name after Independence, but Tiruvalla town still retains its name — Tr.]. The names of several places in the State are inextricably linked with the principal temples there. Tiruvalla has an ancient temple dedicated to “Sree Vallabha”, and Tiruvalla is nothing but the “tadbhava” form of the word “Sree Vallabha” [Sree Vallabha is Lord Vishnu, the Consort of Goddess Lakshmi or Sree — Tr.].

3. This body was born in a house near “Chakra Saalakkadavu” (a branch of the Manimala river) approximately 2 furlongs (about 400 metres — Tr.) east of the Tiruvalla temple. That property is even now being referred to as “Kuzhiyil Parambil House” (which may be loosely translated as “the house in the low-lying compound — Tr). The house belonged to an ancient Nair family which had several distinctions conferred on it. Such titles as “Kurup”, “Pillai” etc., earned by it proclaim its greatness. But nothing is permanent.

Either by extravagance on the part of some of the

heads of the family, or by their ignorance, practically all its immovable properties got sold in auctions. One thing must be stated here — the family had carried on for several generations as an Undivided Hindu Family until 1030 Malayalam Era (1854 A.D) when it had to break into two branches. Paappi Amma and Ummini Amma (Rukmini Amma) were daughters of the same mother. Pappi Amma had two daughters, Narayani Amma and Parvati Amma, and two sons, Govinda Pillai and Padmanabha Pillai. Ummini Amma had two sons, Kesava Pillai and Narayana Pillai, and a daughter by name Kutti Amma. Ummini Amma had received substantial financial assistance from her husband. It was because the Kaaranavanship (i.e office of “Karta” or Administrator of a joint family — Tr.) of the family fell on Paarvathiakaar Govinda Pillai that the entire family property barring a small house got sold in auctions. (A paarvathiakaar is a junior Revenue official subordinate to a Tahsildar - Tr). Some of these properties were purchased at the auction at a low price by Ummini Amma’s husband and made over to her. This enabled the members of the family in Ummini Amma’s branch to live in comfort. They constructed a good house and started living in it separately. This house is known as “Kizhakke Kuzhiyil Parambu” (i.e. the eastern portion of the low-lying compound - Tr). The other branch — “Padinjaare Kuzhiyil Parambu” (i.e. the western portion of the low-lying compound - Tr.) — lived in a mud-house and somehow carried on their existence. It was the noble Nair families of Mathilbhaagam, Tiruvalla (an area in the vicinity of the Sree Vallabha temple - Tr.) that used to process

paddy by de-husking, pounding etc to convert it into rice, and supply the entire requirements of rice of the temple for the daily pujas etc. Pappi Amma used to get a little income from this activity. She must have received some assistance from her husband as well. She got both her daughters married. The elder daughter passed away after giving birth to a child. The younger daughter, Parvati Amma — the author's mother — was married to one Narayanan Nair who was staying near the Tiruvalla temple. He used to work as an attendant in the temple, maintaining and lighting all the oil lamps there in the traditional way, etc. Although his family had landed property and other assets, Narayanan Nair never used to keep an eye on them, and he was quite content with the limited income and other benefits from the temple. Needless to say Parvati Amma used to receive adequate assistance from him. He - the author's father - was an ardent devotee and a detached soul. After completion of their education, both Govinda Pillai and Padmanabha Pillai entered Government service in junior positions. Pappi Amma too passed away in due course, and the entire responsibility of running the family fell on Parvati Amma. Although she was illiterate, her intelligence, acumen and efficiency were unparalleled. Virtues such as integrity, compassion and self-respect shone in her. Her heart and intelligence would always go out to others in distress. For quite some time after her marriage Parvati Amma had no child and she used to perform various religious rites in the hope of begetting a child. It must have been as a result of these observances — making offerings and gifts to the deserving; fasting; penance; worship in

temples etc. — that this humble soul was conceived in her womb in her 25th year, and delivered on the Sukla Paksha Dasami (the 10th day of the bright lunar fortnight - Tr) under the Uthratthaathi star (Uttara Bhadrpadapa or Uttara Proshthapada) Dhanur Lagna in the month of Vrischikam (mid-November to mid-December - Tr) in 1054 Malayalam Era (1879 A.D) (This corresponds to the date 23rd November 1879 A.D - Tr).

4. It can easily be guessed how much happiness this event would have given to the parents, maternal uncles and neighbours. And this boy was named Neelakantan. When he was 4-5 years old, this boy was initiated formally into learning the Malayalam alphabet (Vidyaarambha) at the Bhaktaprayathu Vaaryam and then sent for formal education to the "Kalari" (educational institution) of Velu Aasaan, a profound scholar. Aasaan treated the boy with great affection. When, within about two months, the boy could piece together letters of the Malayalam alphabet and read, and also do simple counting, addition, subtraction etc., he was sent to the Government Central School near the temple where he studied for 4-5 years. I think I studied there until I reached the highest class available there. All the teachers used to display especial love towards this boy and he used to earn prizes in all the classes.

5. There is a house-hold by name "Nallooparambil" near this boy's house, and he had a friend called Kesava Pillai in that house. One day when this boy happened

to go to Kesava Pillai's house, he found him writing out the letters of the English alphabet - A,B,C,D and so on and studying them. Kesava Pillai's elder brother was a student in the Government English School and this was his idea of preparing the younger brother also for being sent to that school. Seeing this, a keen desire arose in the mind of this boy also to study the English language; and then and there he learnt all the 26 letters of the English alphabet. He then returned home and mentioned everything to his mother. The very next day the boy's maternal uncle took both the boys to the English School and got them both admitted to Class I. It was this uncle who bore the entire expenses of the boy's education; and in this school also Neelakantan was the object of love and affection of the teachers.

6. This school had classes only upto Form IV (present-day IX Standard - Tr). Pujya Sri N.Narayana Iyer was its Headmaster. He was indeed a very capable person. He had a nick-name "Tiger of Alappuzha (Alleppey)" which expressed very clearly his courage and capacity to inspire fear (Alappuzha is a port-town and a large commercial centre on the Western Coast of this State - Tr). It was to the C.M.S.College School at Kottayam, about 16 miles (26 km) to the north of Tiruvalla that I had been sent for continuing my studies. There, after having passed Form V (10th Standard) with a high rank, I entered Form VI (Matriculation or S.S.L.C. Stage - Tr).

7. In those days, transportation facilities were not available as we have now. All travel had to be done on

foot. I went once to Kottayam after the holidays to know my result. Soon again I came back home to take my box, books, clothes etc. How much happiness this gave to my mother and the others!

8. "*Asmaakam tu manoratho parichitapraasaa-davaapeetada Kreedaa Kaanana Kelee Kauthuka Jushaam Aayuh Param Ksheeyate*". Practically all the pleasures of worldly persons are derived from their wishes or flights of fancy. Consistently with this, Parvati Amma is also fancifully hoping for happiness from wealth. At that time I had two brothers and two sisters. One of the brothers, Krishna Pillai, was very intelligent and hard-working. Father and maternal uncles had very high expectations about them. Both the boys are clever indeed and one of them has reached the matriculation class (present day XI Standard). Optimistic and pleasant thoughts of a bright future, such as: "Surely, now we have nothing lacking", delight the hearts of the elders. Ere long the curtain falls. The scene that unfolds itself thereafter is indeed awesome beyond words.

9. This "Neelakanta Pillai" stayed in his house on that occasion only for one night. That very same night he experienced some pain in the right leg. Mother got to know about it. When questioned by her, he brushed it aside, saying it was of no consequence. Inwardly the boy was deeply afraid that, if he spoke the truth, they might not permit him to go to Kottayam. At 5 a.m. the next morning, he started after taking some light food. The pain in the leg started getting worse, but ignoring

that, he reached Changanassery (a town about 8 km to the north of Tiruvalla and 18 km south of Kottayam itself - Tr), by 10 a.m. but that day it took him 5-6 hours even to reach Changanassery (a third of the distance - Tr). Feeling dead tired and prostrate and hungry, he sat down on a platform built under a banyan tree on the way. Just then a Namboodiri Brahmin happened to come that way. He invited me, saying; "You look extremely tired and weak. Have some food at my place and then proceed." Reaching that noble brahmin's residence with great delight, I finished my bath and food and then continued my journey. I have not seen that noble soul thereafter. His generosity and large-hearted-ness were firmly implanted in my mind, and many are the times when I have recalled them in my memory. After proceeding a short distance, I instructed the porter who was carrying my things to go ahead, keep my things in the College hostel and get back. And so he did; in fact, midway, I met him on his return journey, but I did not tell him anything about my pain, fearing that, if I told him, mother would grieve when she came to know about it. Look at the short-sightedness of man! The reason for all this must certainly have been my keen desire to continue my studies. After alternate spells of walking and lying down to rest, I eventually reached the Hindu hostel around 5 p.m. On arrival, I did not lie down normally but simply fell down in excruciating pain. The Hostel Manager was Sri Vilvattathu Raghavan Nambiar. He and my dear class-fellows started discussing what best could be done to get me some relief. Thinking it might be a sprain or a dislocation, they got a Christian mother

to come and massage my foot. The pain only got aggravated. (Later it became clear that Nilakanta Pillai had been afflicted with rheumatism and paralysis - Tr). On seeing that, they brought an Ayurvedic Physician (Vaidya). He advised that it was a terrible mistake to have massaged the leg in that condition, and suggested that I be sent back immediately to Tiruvalla. This was on the third day of my reaching Kottayam. How to get back home? The pain was such that I could not take even a single step. All I could do was to keep lying on my back — even turning to one side or the other was totally out of the question — such was the unbearable pain being experienced by me. Who indeed would be willing to take such a patient to Tiruvalla? Not only my class-mates, but nearly every-one in the Hostel held me in some affection. They all consulted among themselves and sent me back to Tiruvalla. Two of my class-mates, N.P.Velu Pillai and Govinda Pillai also accompanied me. Around 10 O'Clock at night they put me in a country craft (small row-boat). About 2 pm the next afternoon, we reached Peringal ferry. My house was over a mile (1½ km) away. How to reach there?

10. Close to my house was a house called "Oorayil". Sri Kesava Pillai of that house-hold had a special affection for me. This was known to Velu Pillai also. Velu Pillai was disinclined to break the news of my ill-health all of a sudden to my mother and the others in my family. He arranged for me to lie down in the river-boat and proceeded to acquaint Kesava Pillai about my condition and my arrival. An extremely anxious and distressed Kesava Pillai went to my house and informed

my maternal uncle, Sri Padmanabha Pillai, but did not convey anything to my mother. Being a very intelligent woman, my mother immediately guessed from the facial expressions of Kesava Pillai, my maternal uncle and others that something very distressing had happened. From the previous day she had been experiencing quite a few bad dreams as well as bad omens. A porcelain jar full of oil which my mother was carrying, had slipped and fallen down from her hands all of a sudden and shattered into a thousand pieces. It is said that this is a particularly bad omen. There is truth in proverbs too!.

11. Around 3 p.m, my uncle, along with Kesava Pillai, Velu Pillai and 2 or 3 servants (coolies) carrying a reclining chair (easy - chair) came to the ferry. Placing me in the chair they had me carried and taken to the house around 4 p.m. Mother gets to know the gravity of the situation; her courage drains away. My uncle and the others console her and apprise her of what has to be done. They made me lie down comfortably in a place. Velu Pillai and Govinda Pillai had to return immediately to Kottayam. My mother feeds them sumptuously and soon they leave for Kottayam after accepting the money needed for their fare.

12. *"Anyathaa Chintitam Kaaryam deivam anyatra chintayet"* (In brief, "Man proposes, God disposes" - Tr).

*"Vannuvonam kazhinju vishuvennum
Vannillallo Thiruvaathirayennum
Itthamoronnu chinthichirikkave
Chathupokunnu kashtam Siva Siva"*

(Translation of the above Malayalam sloka - Onam has come and gone. Vishu is also over. But Thiruvathira has not come (i.e. Ardra Darsanam in December). In the midst of these and other thoughts, alas O Siva, man departs from this world! - Tr).

Here too, all the castles in the air have caught fire. Yet new castles are being built. I am in terrible pain — it is painful if one were to touch even the cot on which I am lying. On top of this, no appetite. I tried my best — but in vain — to keep my pain and suffering from my mother and the others. All around me everyone was in great misery. My father was away in Rameshwaram on a pilgrimage. All my educational expenses were being borne by a maternal uncle, Sri Govinda Pillai. He was an "Amin" (a "process-server" - Tr) in the Munsiff's court and had gone out on some office work. My father had been a rheumatic patient and had obtained relief from treatment by an Ayurvedic Physician, Sri Nanu Vaidyan of Chengannur (a town about 11 km to the south of Tiruvalla - Tr). Everyone had a lot of confidence in that physician and my uncle himself went and fetched him for my treatment; and the line of treatment directed by him was started. By then my father also returned from his pilgrimage to Rameshwaram. It was not as though my father was not distressed by my condition; he had the fortitude to bear anything in life.

13. Arranging for and physically carrying out anyone's ayurvedic treatment is an extremely arduous task. In those days the physician would only prescribe the

composition of the medicines. The entire task of getting the various herbs, roots, leaves and seeds identified, plucked and collected; preparing the Kashaya; processing the medicated oils and then preparing Ksheerabala 108 times repeated; getting ready various oils, ghees and other preparations; and several other time-consuming and labour-intensive items of work had to be got done by the patient's own people in their own premises. All this was enough work and more for the members of the house-hold. If specialised treatment like "Kizhi" or "pizhichil" had to be started, it meant taking the assistance of 4 or 5 outsiders for several days. All this involved quite a good deal of expenditure. It was because of my mother's competence, dedication and organisational skill that all this could be taken up and completed without a hitch.

14. In Kerala in those days chit funds used to be organised everywhere. Whenever mother joined a chit, where the chit was allotted by drawal of lots, she invariably used to get the money at the very first draw. With the interest on this amount, she could pay up the amounts due from time to time, leaving the principal intact. In this way, she had managed to create certain assets such as cash, paddy, ornaments etc. Uncle was a spend-thrift. One can say that, by conducting the marriages of my sisters with pomp and splendour far exceeding his capacity, he managed to wipe out practically all my mother's assets. Mother was also a happy spender. The thought upper most in her mind was: "When my children come of age, what possibly can I lack?" She had reposed practically all her hopes in

this humble soul. It was in these straitened circumstances that I became bed-ridden. Readers will be able to imagine readily how much hardship I would have caused to my doting mother and other relatives. O, God, everything is Thy sport. Who can know the secret of all this? Salutations to that great power which is beyond conception and thought! "*Achintyavaibhavaaya Namoh Namah*".

15. I did not get any relief worth mention from Sri Nanu Vaidyan's treatment. After that, treatment was got done by fetching Sri Kaarakkal Madhava Vaidyan. This was followed by treatment by Ashta Vaidyan Sri Vayaskara Mooss. "Kizhi" and "Pizhichil" treatments were done four or five times and a good deal of money had been spent.

16. I did not render totally useless even this period of affliction. From childhood I had a deep interest in taking a very early bath in the morning and going to temples; in listening to and reading works such as the Bhagavatham and the Ramayanam; and in observing religious days such as Ekadashi, Pradosha etc. Father used to read (Thunchathu Ramanujan) Ezhuthachchan's Sri Bhagavatham for mother and the others to listen to. Sometimes I too used to listen to these readings. Once when I happened to listen to the story of Prahlada being read out I experienced a wonderful sense of pleasure and joy. If only I could also attain devotion like Prahlada's!

17. Owing to the existence of such spiritual tendencies

deep inside me, I never used to experience any sorrow or misery because of my illness. My entire misery lay in the fact that I was the source of unlimited sorrow, misery and hardship for others. My thoughts are even now always for the misery and hardship of others. When people from the neighbourhood used to come and see me out of affection, they used to say: "O, that this has happened to this good boy!" and experience misery; and I used to console them.

18. Even while studying in the school at Tiruvalla, I had learnt by heart several hymns (Stotras). We also used to get magazines such as Prabuddha Bharatam. I had also read an English translation of the Bhagavad Gita. Even at that time I had experienced a desire to read the Bhagavad Gita in the original Sanskrit language. An earnest desire to study Sanskrit was born in me only for this purpose, and this desire was more or less fulfilled right on my sick-bed.

19. Once when Sri K.P.Neelakanta Pillai who had some affection came to see me, he presented me with both the volumes of Bhandarkar's Sanskrit Reader. I began to study both these books on my own. I learned the Bhagavad Gita by heart. Even while studying in the Malayalam School. I had studied books such as Amarakosa, Siddha Rupam, Sanskrit Jnana Deepika, Sri Ramodantam etc. and also several Sanskrit slokas. Even on my sickbed, I used to go through the works of Bhartruhari and other poets. Through these I was able to obtain a small degree of acquaintance with Sanskrit.

20. All of five long years passed in this way — on the sick bed. Treatment continued without respite. Various emotions sprout within me, thinking about the misery and hardship I have been causing to my parents and others. Now I am able to walk a little, using a stick. Several persons came to see me. They happened to mention about the goodness of Lord Guruvayurappan. It was at Guruvayoor that Sri Narayana Bhattathiri who had been afflicted by paralysis got cured. And I happened to hear about the hymn Narayaneeyam which had poured forth from his heart in a ceaseless flow. The thought "How could I reach Guruvayoor?" took pride of place in my heart. For one thing, that place was far, far away. And, on top of that, it was next to impossible to get unreserved approval from my mother and others to my going there.

21. So I must somehow go away without letting them know. This body may have become weak, but there was no weakness of the spirit. Changanassery was only 6 miles (9½ km) from my house. If I could reach that place somehow, then I could go from there by river-craft to Ernakulam and then by bullock-cart to Trichur. And Guruvayoor was just 16 miles (25½ km) from Trichur. All this information I had gathered. "*Iswaro Rakshathu*". (May God look after me -Tr).

22. During the day-time of the night on which I had planned to leave, I had already made the necessary preparations. I had tied together in a small bundle 2-3 books, 2-3 clothes and a little money and secreted the bundle under my bed without anybody knowing about

it. I had also prepared a note: "I am now leaving this place to obviate the misery of all of you and of myself. None need grieve". I intended to leave this note behind. That night also I took the Kashaya medicine. The dose for the next day was also ready. I lay down after taking Kashaya and food. My bed was inside the room. Father, mother and the others used to sleep in the fore-court (front verandah). I was anxiously awaiting the moment when they would all go to sleep. When I was satisfied that they were all fast asleep — it must have been close to midnight then — I quietly slipped out of the room with my bundle and a stick to support me. I had placed a pillow on the bed and affixed my note on to the door. What I am about to do is a heinous act. I never had a thought for the unbearable grief that would be experienced by my parents and others when my absence got discovered, apparently because my mind was soaked with the single thought that I would get substantial relief from my illness if I could go and worship at Guruvayoor. It was all God's will —

23. Well then, from the verandah I came out quickly to the courtyard and from there, on to the road. When I had walked half a mile (just over half a kilometre - Tr), I saw a person who was quite well-known to me but, fortunately, he did not notice me. If he had, the story would have been entirely different. It is indeed the Lord who carries us. Reaching the eastern entrance to the temple, I prayed specially to the Lord and prostrated. Then I resumed walking in the utter darkness of the night. By the crack of dawn I reached Perunna in Changanassery. There is a famous

Subramania temple there and, attached to it, a choultry. I went inside the choultry and, with the caretaker's permission, kept my things there and rested for a while. I told him the entire truth. The caretaker knew my house-hold and also my uncles and others.

24. He insisted that I return home. He threatened that, otherwise, he would straightaway inform my people. When I patiently explained to him and made him understand my precise intention in going to Guruvayoor, he reluctantly agreed. I made it a point to present him with a set of new clothes.

25. Come what may, I must bathe and offer my prayers in the temple. For well over five years, I had not taken my bath in cold water — I used to bathe only in water specially prepared by boiling 5 acidic leaves and berries and then cooling it. Anyway I had enough courage now. I dipped myself in the temple tank, and after finishing my bath, I worshipped the deity in the temple. The caretaker took me to his house for food — excellent rice and curries. It was not as though I was not hungry, but the food would simply not go down my throat. I had also become worried, thinking of my mother and others. Am I to return home? My mind is not willing to agree to that course. I decided to proceed to Guruvayoor itself. Finishing my food, I returned to the choultry and quietly waited. By 4 p.m I proceeded to the Market Jetty where country-craft wait (to pick up, and load and unload cargo - Tr). I have a feeling that the caretaker had also accompanied me.

26. That was a market-day. Changanassery was a very famous and prominent market centre. Many are the commodities and vegetables brought here for sale on the market-day and country-craft (river-boats) laden with all kinds of goods ply to other centres. I went close to the river-boat which would be leaving for Ernakulam and, with the boatman's permission, got inside it and sat in a corner. It is not unlikely that somebody may come from Tiruvalla in search of me. It was precisely to escape from such persons that, much before its departure time, I got inside the craft which was laden with bunches and bunches of plantain (banana) fruits. The boat fare did not exceed 4-5 annas (25-30 paise).

27. Here I get a co-passenger-cum-follower, a tall, hefty person who wanted to go aimlessly just anywhere and not to any specific destination. When he happened to talk to me in the Jetty before he boarded the craft, it struck him, and he decided, that he should travel with me, and he got into the craft along with me. He had quarrelled with his people at home and was getting away. Think of the greatness of the Lord! He is the greatest Helper of the helpless ones. He keeps on rendering help from time to time to those who think of Him. He indeed is our true Mother; and Father; and Friend; and Relative; and Knowledge; and Wealth - Our Everything! "*Tvameva Maataa cha Pitaa Tvameva / Tvameva bandhuscha Sakhaa Tvameva / Tvameva Vidyaa Dravinam Tvameva / Tvameva sarvam mama deva deva*". One who understands this truth understands everything. It is for the realisation of this truth that He keeps on creating misfortunes and

calamities for those who avidly desire to worship Him. "*Vipadah Santu nah sasvat*" — "May calamities befall us eternally" — was Kunti devi's prayer.

28. The craft continues to be moored in the Jetty until 8 or 9 p.m. How much inconvenience and trouble are experienced by the travellers! Today travel facilities have increased manifold because we now have buses, steamboats, trains, and, to crown them all, aeroplanes. The boat started moving after 9 p.m. A great relief indeed. We reached a place called Tanneermukkam around noon the next day. That was an excise check post. Excise officials are posted there to check all river-craft. This affords some rest and respite to the passengers too. This is a good opportunity for taking one's bath or food. Myself and my co-passenger got out of the boat, had our bath in a temple tank, worshipped at the temple, procured some eatables — fruit or some beaten rice — from a shop and started eating. In those days there used to be 5 or 6 river-boats proceeding from Changanassery to Tanneermukkam. From one of those boats, a man was shouting "that is, don't let that man, this person, get away. I am now coming from Tiruvalla. He is running away unauthorisedly. His mother and others are in great misery, they are as good as dead. So this person must be sent back to Tiruvalla." The moment this announcement was heard, policemen crowded around me. They threatened me, saying they would send me back to Tiruvalla under police escort. I had plenty of courage, and I told them: "I am proceeding to Ernakulam for my examination. If you send me forcibly somewhere else, I would not be able to write

the examination, and you will be responsible for all the consequences." On hearing my words uttered without the slightest tinge of fear or hesitation, doubts started getting created in their minds. They said: "Let's take a look at your bundle." I opened the bundle and showed it to them. They saw only the books and the clothes; they did not notice the saffron-coloured earth in it. They then allowed me to proceed to Ernakulam itself. As the boatman was hurrying me, I got into the craft quickly. I should say that I ate practically nothing, but my co-passenger had taken food.

29. The boat encountered favourable wind. When all the sails were fixed, it started moving faster. By 7 a.m. the next morning, we reached Ernakulam. Both of us disembarked.

30. On hearing about the miseries of my parents and others at Tanneermukkam, I too had become considerably agitated. As soon as I touched land at Ernakulam, I started making enquiries about the location of the Posts and Telegraphs office. I had never been to Ernakulam before. My mother had not permitted me to go even to places in the vicinity of our house. She had agreed to send me to Kottayam only because it was inescapable for my studies. I was the apple of her eye, so far as my mother was concerned. I located the telegraph office and immediately sent a telegram to Tiruvalla : "PROCEEDING GURUVAYOOR
(.) NONE NEED GRIEVE".

31. Ernakulam being on the banks of a lake, the

majesty, grandeur and beauty of its buildings get enhanced three times. But I was hardly conscious of all that. I asked for the location of the temple. After taking my bath in the temple tank, I worshipped the deity. One could buy lumps of cooked rice from the temple. Both of us procured rice and ate it. Now I should get to Trichur. One could get into a bullock-cart or into a horse-drawn vehicle which could carry 4-5 persons. In those days people generally used to walk the distance to Trichur. As I could not walk such long distances, I climbed into a bullock-cart along with some others and started the journey to Trichur. My fellow-traveller did not get into the cart, but without separating from me, started walking alongside the cart. Around 4 p.m we reached Trichur. I may have paid 6-7 annas as the fare (37-44 paise - Tr). There are several hotels there. We entered a Brahmana hotel and kept our things there. I was extremely eager to worship at the famous Vadakkunnaatha (Siva) temple there. Taking our bath in the temple tank, we entered the temple precincts. It is difficult to do worship systematically in that large temple without the aid of a professional "guide". One such person got hold of us and enabled us to worship. The aarati (deepaaraadhana) too was over. Our guide said: "Now you must get back immediately to your hotel. There are plenty of thieves here and one of them may take away your things." In view of this, we rushed back to the hotel, took our food and spent the night in the hotel itself.

32. By dawn we started for Guruvayoor, 16 miles (25½ km) from Trichur. As I did not have money for the cart

fare, we decided to walk the distance. I could just walk in a manner with the help of the stick. We proceeded, asking for directions at every turn and corner. My fellow-traveller helped me out whenever I was in trouble. On occasions he even carried me. What should I say? Somehow, sitting, walking, crawling, lying down, we reached Guruvayoor. Oh, what good fortune!

33. At the eastern entrance, outside the Gopuram (temple tower) there is a Deepastambham (a tall, granite pillar carrying hundreds of lamps which would be lighted with wick and oil - Tr). This pillar was erected by the famous Sir C.Sankaran Nair. This humble soul too reached that Pillar. The door to the Sanctum Sanctorum was open. It would have been about 5 p.m. then. "*Tat taavat bhaati saakshaat Gurupavanapure. Hanta bhaagyam janaanaam*". (This is a quotation from the very first stanza of the immortal work Narayaneeyam by Shri Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiri extolling the various incarnations, disportations and glories of Lord Narayana, "dwelling as Guruvayurappan Himself at Guruvayoor . O, how fortunate indeed the people are!" - Tr). A great effulgence radiates outside from inside the Sanctum Sanctorum. At this unforgettable and rare sight all my troubles vanished like darkness dispelled by the morning sun. The very first thought that arose in my mind was that I was not fortunate enough to worship Guruvayoorappan earlier. I consoled myself, thinking that, at least now, this fortune had befallen me. My whole body is impatiently clamouring for the darshan of the Lord after quickly finishing my bath. After finishing my bath

at the temple tank, I entered the temple precincts along with my fellow-traveller. Standing in front of the sanctum sanctorum, I worshipped the Lord and experienced a deep bliss. We returned again outside the eastern temple tower and put up our wet clothes for drying. Since I had not taken any food for practically the whole day, my thoughts now turned towards food. I got acquainted with a person who was doing regular worship (bhajanam). I gave him a few coins. Around 9 p.m he came with a portion of the "cooked rice" that had been offered to Sri Guruvayoorappan. Squatting on the southern verandah outside the eastern gate, we ate the rice. Salt and water were the sole side-dishes. But it is difficult to describe the heavenly taste of the rice. I can say that, never before or after that, had I tasted such delicious food. "Hunger is the best sauce", so the saying goes. After food, we spread a cloth on the ground outside the eastern entrance and fell into delicious slumber.

34. Although quite a few people would have heard and known about this place and this temple, let me also add one or two words of my own. The idol installed inside the sanctum sanctorum is said to have been consecrated jointly by Guru (Jupiter) and Vayu (the wind-god). A special divinity has been attributed to this idol. This idol, before installation, became visible to Guru and Vayu (Pavana) in a river somewhere. Realising the great divinity of the idol, they decided to instal it and consecrate it at some worthy place for public benefit. The place selected by them got the name Guruvayoor (Gurupavanapuram) and the deity started being referred to as Guruvayoorappan (Guruvatapuraadheesan; Gurupavana-puraadheesan). This is a very ancient temple. It is learnt that Sri Melpathur Narayana Bhattathiri who had been rendered immobile by paralysis was suspended from an "Uri" (a kind of conical sling made of rope in which earthen pots containing curd, butter etc are customarily kept and hung up from a hook on the ceiling, beyond the reach of cats and mischievous children - Tr) in front of the sanctum sanctorum and that, seated in the "Uri", he carried on continuous worship of the deity. The immortal classic Narayaneeyam issued forth from the innermost recesses of his heart. This composition contains the entire essence of the Bhagavatham. As soon as the work was completed, Bhattathiri fully recovered from his affliction. And he was blessed with the vision of the Lord. The first stanza of the last decad(dasaka) of this work begins with the

stirring words "Agre pasyaami". ("I see right in front of me" - Tr).

35. This composition is divided into 100 dasakas (decads) generally 10 slokas each, but some have 11, 12 or even 13 slokas. The last verse in each dasaka ends with an appeal to Lord Guruvayoorappan: "*Gurupavanapuraadheesa maam paahi*" ("O, Lord of Gurupavanapura, please protect me, (i.e. relieve me of my affliction" - Tr) or words to that effect. "*Ko deergha rogo! Bhava eva saadho*," "which is the long (longest) disease/affliction!" is the question. "Bhava, samsara, the unending cycle of births and deaths, is the longest disease" is the answer. "*Sareeram aadyan Khalu dharma saadhanam*." Is not the body the boat that ferries us to the other side of samsara? This body must therefore be looked after well. By continuous and assiduous worship of the Lord, both the diseases are assuaged -physical (bodily) and Samsara.

36. I gathered information from that worshipper regarding the practices, modes of worship, offerings etc in the temple. For the calls of nature, one had to go some distance from the temple. After answering the calls of nature in the morning, myself and my fellow traveller were coming back to the temple when he told me: "I do not wish to stay here. Right now I wish to return home:". He had no money. He sold his (gold) ear-rings and waist girdle to somebody. quickly and got ready cash. Immediately he left for home. He had to travel via Tiruvalla. He undertook to call at my house and intimate all details to my people. I thought: "Was

not this person sent just for rendering me help and assistance?" What else could I do but think of the Lord's infinite compassion and fold my hands in silent prayer? (The words "Lord's compassion" occur for the first time here in Malayalam. "Easwara Kaarunyam" is the alternative title of this divine composition — Tr).

37. And once again I was all alone. I used to spend the time in bathing in the temple tank, worshipping the Lord, chanting his sacred names, doing circumambulation of the temple etc. friendly worshipper made arrangements for me to have food regularly at the nearby house of a Namboodiri Brahmin and spend the night there itself. The daily expenditure never exceeded 2 annas (12½ paise). I used to take food only once a day — that too, after 12 noon when the mid-day pooja in the temple would have been over.

38. What a bliss! On the dot of 3 am, the Chief Priest Namboodiri opens the door of the sanctum sanctorum. Every day, without fail, this soul also finishes his bath then and reaches the temple to witness the "Nirmaalya Darsanam". The sandal paste, flower garlands, ornaments etc with which the deity had been decorated the previous day are removed, the idol is anointed with gingilly(til) oil, and the oil is then washed away with "Vaaka Powder". Thereafter abhisheka is done for the deity. This abhisheka theertha is called "Vaaka Chaarthu". This Vaaka theertha is considered to be a sacred, divine medicine. When the Vaaka Chaarthu theertha issues out from the (granite stone) spout, several people would be waiting there to collect a few

drops and apply them on their head, face and eyes and to imbibe a little quantity. I too used to penetrate the crowd and collect a few drops every day. After the Vaaka Chaarthu, follow the Suddha Abhishekam; offering of fried paddy to the deity (Malar or Nelpori Neivedyam); Usha Pooja; the morning Sri Bali; Pantheeradi Pooja; and Ucha Pooja (noon pooja, also called Prasanna Pooja). While these poojas are being performed, there will be music — vocal and percussional. At the steps to the sanctum (sopanam) Ashtapadi (Geetha Govindam) will be sung to the accompaniment of a special percussion instrument called Idakka. This Geetha Govindam was composed by Jaya Deva. Excellent Sanskrit, all the stanzas wrought in devotion and melody — the composition excels in devotion. Jaya Deva himself says,

*"Yadi Hari smarane sarasam mano
Yadi vilasa Kalaa sukuthoohalam
Srnu tadaa Jaya Deva saraswatim"*

Meaning as given by Guru Maharaj himself: "If you desire to remember Sri Hari lovingly / If you have curiosity in the flourishing of art / Then listen to Jaya Deva's Saraswati (poetry)".

How true! This is not to be taken as self-trumpeting. All he has done is to tell the truth, the Reality, that essence from his immortal self. My own knowledge of Sanskrit improved when I started getting by heart Narayaneeyam and other hymns. I used to be present inside invariably at the time of all the poojas. While trying to appreciate and soak myself in the beauty and

flavour of the Ashtapadi, while listening to the pangs of separation of Radha, I too used to experience a kind of ache in my heart. Slowly I got to know the entire Ashtapadi by heart along with its meaning.

39. It must be said that all thought of home and nest has vanished now. One day, after worshipping the deity at mid-day (noon) pooja, turning back, I saw my uncle standing there. I have already mentioned that this uncle had a very special affection for me. On seeing him I prostrated before him. He was also in a happy mood because of "darshan" of the Lord. He had come with the intention of taking me home. All his anger towards me had subsided. With great happiness he said: "It is through you that I got this good fortune". He made certain arrangements for my stay at Guruvayoor. Although he desired to stay at Guruvayoor for several days, he had to return home after 2 or 3 days because he was a Government official.

40. My mother, father and everyone else also now heaved a sigh of relief. I too was relieved.

41. My bath was invariably in the temple tank. Twice daily in any case, sometimes even more. It was the oil anointed on the idol that I used to apply on my head before bathing. My acquaintance with Mannarathu Gopalan Nair, the attendant of the Chief Priest, secured for me several facilities. All this is Lord's will. He took me to the Chief Priest and got me his permission to stay in the Chief Priest's premises and to have my food there. I could eat only after the Chief Priest had

partaken of food, but then what I got for eating was the choicest pick, the best of the best items offered to the Lord as Neivedyam. I considered this to be an exceptional good fortune. Now I used to take food occasionally at night as well.

42. Does not the temple throw open the doors of the sanctum at 3 O'clock every morning? What inexplicable joy the eyes and the heart experience on witnessing the Nirmalya Darsanam! The mind experiences absolute tranquility and peace. And it is in peace that happiness resides. Many are the patients who come here, and most of them return fully cured. This fact became fully established in my own case. And slowly experience also gets built up. A person, Kunjunni Nair, had lost his speech. His people brought him to Guruvayoor for regular worship (bhajanam). After a few days the word "Krishna..." issued forth loudly from his mouth. From then onwards he started singing loudly songs glorifying the Lord and worshipping him. Eventually he became one of His foremost devotees.

43. When the sanctum sanctorum opens at 3 a.m., I would sing the very first verse of Naaraayaneeyam : "Saandraanandaavabodhaatmaka....". Then I would circumambulate the temple. Sometimes I would explain the meaning of this verse to some of the other devotees. When the sanctum opens for the mid-day (noon) pooja, I would sing the entire last dasaka of the Naarayaneeyam, beginning with "Agre Pasyaami".

44. The pain in the leg and the general ill-health are

progressively getting cured. I can now walk without the help of the stick. Treatment and cure here are on the Naturopathy — Nature cure — system. Bathing in cold water; seeing good things with the eyes; pure air; clean and sanctified premises and surroundings; listening to the Bhagavatham and other sacred scriptures; Harinama sankeerthanam; japa; meditation — the mind is constantly engaged in these activities. There is no time to think of one's physical ailments. The mind experiences perfect happiness always; and this happiness percolates into the physical body. How much merit one must have earned to experience such a state!

45. I spent 5-6 months there, leading such a blessed life. Mother once sent my younger brother to Guruvayoor along with an attendant. They too were looked after and sent back. Eventually I too decided to return home.

46. *Paropakaaraartham idam sareeram* — “this body is intended for service to others” — I had learnt this truth from my childhood itself. One person from my part of the country happened to come to Guruvayoor. I kept him with me for 3 - 4 days. He had no money with him. After 4 days he developed fever and head-ache and eruptions on the face the next day. This is naturally an indication of small-pox. Here the people are mortally afraid of small-pox; the very mention of the word strikes terror. What can I do? Even Gopalan Nair (the Chief Priest's attendant) insisted that the sick person be taken away. It was summer then. I had noticed a bridge while proceeding westwards from the western entrance to

the temple. First I took the patient to a secret place under the bridge and made him lie down there. Then I discovered a place nearby which was densely populated by trees. I took him inside that place and made him remain there. All this I had to do myself. I used to take him food and medicines in the morning and evening. Some Muslims were staying not far away. Are they also not human beings? Seeing the distressing and helpless condition of the patient, they extended a helping hand. Everything was because of the greatness of the Lord — what else can I say? At last the man got cured and took his bath. He stayed for a few more days.

47. My next thought was for going home. I collected quantities of the oil anointed on the deity — a whole tinfal; and other things. There is a place called Chaavakkaad close to Guruvayoor. Merchants used to proceed from there by river-craft for procuring bunches of plantain fruits and other commodities from Changanassery. I proposed to travel with them in one such boat. The Chief Priest is the Lord's Representative. With his approval and blessings, I got into the river-craft during day-time one day with all my bundles of things. The patient who had recovered from small-pox was also with me. I had to spend 2-3 days in the boat. We would have our bath and take our food when the boat halted and was tied up at some intermediate points. It was 1 O'clock at night when we reached the Changanassery Market Jetty. I sent all my things in advance through the man who was with me. And, all alone, I started immediately on foot for Tiruvalla which I reached around 3 a.m. I did not have much pain but

the leg had become very weak. Needless to say mother was extremely happy. Now it has become a compulsion to have an early bath and worship the deity. After resting a while, I proceeded to the temple, bathed in the tank and worshipped Sri Vallabha. I returned home around 9 a.m and had my food and rest. With great glee I narrated all my experiences to all those who came calling at my house to see me. All were happy.

CHAPTER - 3

48. I was keen to resume my education. It was over 5 years since I left school. Nevertheless I had not forgotten much. This became clear to me during my conversations with students studying in the VI Form (Matriculation or X Standard — Tr).

49. In any case, father took me to Kottayam. Oorayil Kesava Pillai was a famous lawyer. He was having his legal practice then at Kottayam. He was a close friend of my father's. We went straight to his place at Kottayam — near the Tirunakkara temple. He knew my nature. With delight he made me stay with him. While there, whenever convenient. I used to teach his nephew.

50. We went to the C.M.S.School around 11 a.m after food for securing re-admission to the school. The Principal then was an Englishman, one Mr.Asquith. When we explained matters to him, his reaction was : "It is over five years since the boy left school. It is not, therefore, possible, to admit him to Form VI. I can only permit him to join Form IV ". (Form IV is equivalent to 8th std. - Tr).

51. All my class-mates had become graduates. So, joining VI Form itself meant considerable loss of self-respect. What then to speak of joining Form IV?

52. Boldly I told the Principal: "Sir, you must admit me in VI Form itself. In such and such an year, out of

the 100 students who had taken the examination for promotion from Form V to VI, only 9 had passed in all the papers. The others had simply been promoted. I was one of those nine". On hearing this, Mr.Asquith himself went and fetched that particular year's examination register — a bulky tome — and he consulted that book in my presence. He glanced through the relevant entries just once and closed the book. He then sent for the Headmaster and instructed him that I should be admitted to Form VI itself. He also ordered that a certificate of my physical fitness should be produced from a doctor.

53. Almost everyone holds the Vayaskara Mooss (one of the 8 leading Ayurvedic Physicians in Kerala - Tr) in great respect. Thinking that a letter from the Mooss would serve admirably as a medical certificate, armed with suitable presents, myself and my father proceeded to his residence around 4 p.m. It will be recalled that I had been under the Mooss's treatment. He recognised me at once and we explained to him the situation as also our object in calling on him. Just then the Headmaster, Shri P.M.Chacko, happened to come there. The Mooss spoke to him favourably about me, and he agreed to admit me the next day.

54. The next day itself I joined the class and started studying. Despite my having studied with care and attention, I managed to fail, but I did not feel any disappointment. Thereafter I never went to school. I continued my studies at home itself. Death claimed my uncle as a victim and I became afflicted with my old

disease again. Treatment started again. Once I remitted fees for the examination but I fell sick at the time of the examination and could not even walk. Then I decided that I would not study thereafter. I went to Guruvayoor again and returned after staying there for 5-6 months. My father too passed away and my mother also became ill. My mother's one great desire was that I should be at her death-bed.

55. Mother's illness worsened. Treatment continued uninterruptedly. Despite her illness, she continued to attend to the house-hold work without fail. She became bed-ridden but only for 3 days. I was constantly beside her. Chanting of the Lord's names continued day and night. On the night of the third day, my mother attained her heavenly abode.

56. I was ceaselessly praying for her peaceful death without pain or agony; even so when the soul departed from her body, I experienced unbearable pain, anguish and grief. I practically collapsed.

*"Aastaam taavad iyam prasooti samaye durvara
soolavyadhaa | Nairuchyam tanusoshanam malamayee
- sayyaa chasaamvatsaree |
Ekasyaapina garbhabhaaraabharanaklesasya Yasyaah
kshamo | Daatum nishkritim unnatopi tanayastasyai
jananyai Namah, tasyai jananyai namah"*

Cremation and other conventional rites were performed the next day. The subsequent rites were performed by myself and my younger sister. My younger brother was

a Government servant at Devikulam. Immediately on receiving the telegram, he too came. After performing all the rites upto Pinda, a grand feast was given on the 16th day. The priest was also kept satisfied. I observed the deeksha till the 41st day; on that day we gave a feast for the Brahmanas and gave them dakshina.

57. I may say that I had now become practically independent. All it meant was that I could carry on my activities of devotion and worship to my heart's content and at my convenience. This was because while mother had not permitted me to go anywhere, I was now master of my own time. I have never whiled away time to no purpose. Even on my sick bed I used to study and teach others whenever I could. It was the little knowledge of Sanskrit that I had which paved the way for my unlimited good. I continued to teach small children something useful. A small building in a nearby temple was converted into a class-room where I used to teach children for some time. One gentleman took me to a place called Kalluppara. There also I started teaching some children. This small class later developed into a little school. I was again bed-ridden and I returned home.

58. Obstacles used to arise in the execution of things that the heart cherished. I started spending practically all my time in devotion and worship. The temple at Tiruvalla was indeed a large and sacred one. Reaching the temple very early in the morning, I used to do all my japa, meditation, chanting and reading of sacred texts there itself. Now I had started reading the

Bhagavatham text in the original Sanskrit itself regularly. The lady of the house-hold called "Sankara Velil" near the temple happened to express a desire to hear Bhagavatham being read. In response to this, I used to go to that house regularly every night and read the Bhagavatham. This lady's eldest son Nanu Pillai and some others used to be present regularly to listen. Nanu Pillai used to have a lot of affection, regard and respect for me; he was also my class-mate.

59. In the temple too, after the evening Deepaaradhana (Aarti) group singing of devotional songs used to be conducted. Even from childhood I used to enjoy listening to music. I used to experience ineffable joy, listening to the strains of devotional music issuing forth melodiously from the mouths of devotees, to the accompaniment of percussion and other instruments. I could not even restrain myself from dancing to these mellifluous tunes. This daily music festival would last for 2 hours. Thereafter I would go to "Sankara Velil" to begin my Bhagavatham reading. The lady of the house felt extremely happy; and her regard and respect for me increased to the extent of a mother's love and affection for her son. This noble, fortunate lady was indeed a second mother, granted to me after my own mother's death. I continued leading such a happy life.

60. I had a dear friend by name Paramu Pillai who was a clerk in the Munsiff's court. In those days the Munsiff was Shri M.R.Narayana Pillai. He was a religious man and particularly an ardent devotee of Shri Ramakrishna. In accordance with his wishes in

1910 a Ramakrishna Sangh was established at Tiruvalla. Most of its members were clerks and lawyers. In the absence of a common meeting place, the members used to meet at 7 p.m. on Sundays in various houses by rotation and conduct Kirtan, reading of texts etc. Paramu Pillai's turn to host the assembly came. He compelled me also to attend the session. And what did I see there? Some people were sitting there. There was neither interest nor curiosity on their faces. I too sat down there. I had with me the Bhagavatham text in Sanskrit. They expressed a desire to hear something from this "Swamiji". Although I was not a Swamiji or any such religious person, they used to address me as Swamiji with devotion. After remembering the Lord devoutly, I opened the Bhagavatham text and started reading out a portion. Even now I distinctly remember that particular portion. As soon as the notes from Lord Krishna's flute were heard, several Gopika women came running with agitated minds to the forest where he was sitting and playing. The Lord entertained them all with sweet words. Then he told them: "It was not at all proper on your part to have come at this midnight time to this forest which is full of cruel wild beasts. For women their husbands are their gods. If they serve their husbands with devotion, what indeed can women not attain? They can get everything. You have extreme devotion for me, there is no doubt at all about it. You have now seen me. I too am very happy on seeing you. Now you must all return home. "It is impossible to describe the grief experienced by the Gopikas on hearing this. It is but natural that they felt irritated and annoyed with the Lord. In sobbing tones they told the

Lord: "O Lord! Please do not utter such unpleasant words to us who, abandoning everything and thinking that you are our everything, have sought refuge in you".

61. It was this portion that I had read out to them and explained the meaning. Every one present felt happy. In fact, practically everyone shed tears. The reading ended at about 9 p.m. After Mangala-aarti and distribution of prasada, all of them returned home, and I proceeded to Sankaravelil house where I had to begin the customary reading of Bhagavatham. Just then, a person comes there, with a lantern to escort me.

62. As readers would have noted, Shri M.R.Narayana Pillai had a special interest in the Sangh. The members used to apprise him immediately of what transpired at each session. The moment he heard about what happened at today's meeting, he felt a keen desire to see me.

63. I reach his house, escorted by the peon. He receives me and seats me with great respect. Some other gentlemen were also present there. He too must listen to my Bhagavatham reading. He had the text with him. I read out for him. He as well as the others present experienced great joy. That was the very first time I was meeting him, and I took an immediate liking to him. This bond of friendship became firmly established. All these are but the Lord's disportations. He has since departed from this world but the fond memories of my

friendship with him still linger fresh in my mind. The peon escorted me back to Sankaravelil.

64. My presence was insisted upon at all the sessions of the Sangh and there was nothing I could do to wriggle out. Not only that, they then elected me as the President of the Sangh. At that time we managed to secure a place, near my and M.R.'s houses, where the Sangh could hold its sessions regularly. That was the bungalow belonging to the leading lawyer Oorayil Kesava Pillai (A reference has been made to him already in para 49 above - Tr). It was in that place that, in the presence of Shri M.R., the Sangh continued to hold its weekly sessions. This was the Poorvaashram of Swami Nirvikarananda.

65. There is now increasing enthusiasm and devotion on the part of people in general, and singing of devotional songs, group chanting and reading of sacred texts are being organised ever more than before, in each house.

66. I have already mentioned that Munsiff Shri.M.R. was an ardent devotee of Shri Ramakrishna. Prior to that he was Munsiff at Haripaad. Haripaad was a place quite well-known to him, and he had already established a Shri Ramakrishna Sangh there. Lawyer Shri Subbaraya Iyer and Dr.Chellappa and others were its prominent members. Sri Nirmalananda Swamiji was the then President of the Bangalore Ashram. He was a disciple of Shri Ramakrishna. One was not fortunate enough to have had darshan of Shri Ramakrishna. Who

could deny himself the good fortune and pleasure of seeing one of his disciples? The Haripaad Sangh people invited Swami Nirmalanandaji to that place. Lawyer Shri Subbaraya Iyer went to Bangalore and escorted the Swamiji to Haripad. They had also informed M.R. of the date on which Swamiji would be reaching Haripaad. M.R. got ready to leave. M.R and myself used to meet daily. When I learned from M.R about the Swamiji's visit, I was very eager to have his darshan. M.R. was very happy at this.

67. In those days, a yoga practitioner, by name Sthanu Aasaari used to stay with M.R. It seems he had experienced Samadhi frequently. He was married and had his family and children. His house was in Tiruvananthapuram. Quite a few people used to treat him with great devotion as though to a preceptor. Along with both of them (Shri Aasaari and Shri M.R), I too left for Haripaad by a separate river-craft from Pulikkezh ferry around evening. Towards midnight we reached Pallipaadu. Arrangements had been made there for our stay at the residence of Koikkaleth Shri Velu Pillai. There is a good Krishna temple there. After taking some food we spent the night there. The next day we worshipped at the Krishna temple, had food and rested.

68. My thoughts were all about the Swamiji. The eagerness to have his darshan at the earliest multiplied several times. Around 11 O'clock all of us started for Haripad. Partly on foot and partly by bullock-cart, around 12 Noon we reached the Valiakottaram (Big Palace) near the Haripad temple. It was there that

arrangements had been made for the Swamiji's stay. Entering the Palace, I saluted my preceptor Shri Subbaraya Iyer and gathered all details from him.

69. The Swamiji had just finished his food and was resting. I had a great desire to consume the left-overs from the Swamiji's food. I enquired: "Well, is the leaf off which Swamiji ate, still there? And I received the answer: "Yes, the leaf is still here only". Immediately I rushed there, ate all the left-overs and derived immense satisfaction. Returning I came back to M.R and sat beside him, eagerly awaiting the Swamiji's darshan.

70. A small dais had been put up there and a chair placed on it for the Swamiji to sit. Swamiji graced the dais with his arrival around 4 p.m. after rest.

*Vastram Vapus Vachanam Vidyaa Vinayam enniva
Vakaaram Anchum Illaathon Nissaaran Bhuvi Kevalam.*

(Translation of this Malayalam verse: "He who does not have these five "Vakaaras" (words beginning with the letter "Va"), Vastram : befitting dress; Vapus : a good body; Vachanam: good speech; Vidyaa : Knowledge/learning; Vinayam : Humility; is indeed of no consequence in this world" - Tr). These five vakaaras had fully blossomed in the Swamiji. A tall and grand personality (aajaanubahu); eyes flashing fire; valiant as a lion; sporting courage, valour and refuge on his face — a veritable Rudra at the time of the deluge (Samhaara Rudra). All eyes turn to the Swamiji. (The

Swamiji was one of the direct disciples of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa - Tr).

71. The Swamiji is welcomed and received there. After glancing all around with eyes flashing fire, Swamiji sat down. M.R and myself, along with several others, sat on a bench down below on the ground.

72. This humble soul was of no consequence, a mere trifling unfit even to go near Swamiji. I had not brought any offering for him. All I had was a good garland of tulasi leaves (Osimum). Will Swamiji accept it? How to reach Swamiji's lotus feet? When my mind was in utter turmoil with these and similar thoughts, that Embodiment of Love, the Lord, looked at me and enquired of others: "Is he not a devotee (Bhakta)?" The moment I heard these words, I mustered up all the courage I needed, forgot everything else, rushed to the Swamiji's feet and prostrated before them. In actual fact, what I had done was not to prostrate at his feet but to repose my head on his lap. And with that act, I had unconsciously transferred all my burdens and problems to him. Even now, is not this head reposing in that lap? I felt that the Swamiji had accepted me just as a loving father lifting up his little son and placing him on his lap. All my burdens had disappeared. It was all God's compassion — OM.

*"Koti yugangalilaayi sanchayicheedunna
Punyaphalamanee Martyajanmam
Theduvin Sadguru paada padmam
Punarneduvin Sowbhaagya Jnaanaamrtam"*

(Translation of this Malayalam verse : "This human birth is the culmination of the merits assiduously accumulated over crores of Yugas. (Having got such a rare birth) go forth and search for the lotus feet of a good Preceptor; and obtain once again the nectar of Prosperity and Pure Knowledge"-Tr).

CHAPTER - 4

73. I returned to my seat and sat down. The organisers read out felicitation addresses and presented the scrolls to Swamiji. Swamiji spoke only a few words that day, "All this honour shown by you to this insignificant person is not because of any merit in me but only because of the compassion of my Gurunath". By the time Swamiji had spoken these few words, streams of tears started flowing down from his eyes. O, how very fortunate and blessed are those who have abiding devotion to the lotus feet of their preceptors! "*Guroranghri Padme manaschennalagnam tata kim, tata kim, tata kim tata kim?*" Meaning as given by the Guru Maharaj himself: "Even though a person may possess all material wealth, if he does not have devotion to the Guru's lotus feet, all that wealth is of no consequence; it is of no consequence".

74. After talking for a while, Swamiji returned to his room for rest. The members of the audience returned to their houses, their hearts content with the Swamiji's darshan and listening to his honeyed words.

75. That night, a Brahmana gentleman, Subramania Iyer by name, took me and the others to his house. After taking food there, I rested with the single thought "Swamiji" pervading my mind.

76. In the morning we again reached Haripad. In the forenoon there was a "Bhajana Yatra" in the Subramania temple in honour of Swamiji and I too participated in

that. Extremely heart-warming devotional songs were sung. I am always thrilled to hear such songs. That evening Swamiji gave a long speech in the High School.

77. At night I again reached the Big Palace (Valiakottaram) for Swamiji's darshan, along with M.R. Having prostrated before Swamiji with devotion, I kept standing near him. Swamiji asked me so many things. Finally he asked me: "Do you know Gita Govindam, Ashtapadi? Please sing it". I have already mentioned something about Gita Govindam. I had learnt by heart the full Ashtapadi, beginning "*Maamiyam Chalita....*". I had no knowledge or sense of raga or taala; still, in order to please Swamiji I sang that Ashtapadi without hesitation or shyness. Haripad was famous for good music; still I think nobody found my singing unpleasant.

78. Then calling me to him, Swamiji ordered: "You must return to Tiruvalla itself. There you must develop the Sangh." Then he conferred on me the title "**Neelakanta Bhakta**". Was it not a rebirth that this humble soul got then?

79. The next day we returned to Tiruvalla, Swamiji returned to Bangalore. He used to send me letters frequently from Bangalore, first through M.R and later directly. I used to preserve those letters with great devotion. However it is distressing that, somewhere, sometime during my frequent travels, they got lost.

80. Along with M.R. I started from Tiruvananthapuram with the intention of visiting the principal pilgrimage centres in India. We first went to Bangalore for Swamiji's darshan. Bangalore is a holiday resort. It was Swami Abhedanandaji who thought of establishing the Ashram which is situated in a good locality. The foundation stone was also laid by him. It is Swami Nirmalanandaji who completed the construction and brought this Ashram to its present stage. A special peace and tranquillity manifests itself in this Ashram. All parts of the Ashram are kept immaculately clean and tidy. The whole place was adorned by flower gardens and mango orchards. Swamiji is a great person, well-conversant with all fields of activity. One could say he is a versatile genius. One need not say much about the excellence and greatness of an Ashram administered by such a great and eminent person.

81. M.R. and myself stayed there happily for 3-4 days. Swamiji had at that time been invited by some eminent persons to visit the Nilgiris. Swamiji took us both along too, and we reached the Nilgiris comfortably. There were several people at the railway station, awaiting Swamiji's arrival. They received Swamiji and escorted him. Along with Swamiji, both of us also got the opportunity of staying in a good bungalow. The lawyer Parappanangaadi Shri Kunjirama Menon had called on Swamiji first even *en route*, and he used to come here too off and on.

82. As is well-known, Nilgiri is a cold place. We reached there during summer — in April, or perhaps in May. This was my first experience of staying in a cold place. Daily there were speeches by Swamiji, as well as conversations with people. At this distance of time, I am unable to recall them, but I still remember vividly one particular incident.

83. The famous lawyer Shri Haripad Krishna Iyer came once for the Swamiji's darshan. It was from the standpoint of an atheist (nihilist or naastika) that he began speaking to Swamiji. When he returned, there was a little bit of change in him. When it was explained to him beyond doubt who or what the "I" was, he became a theist.

84. I am able to see you; so I the "seer" must certainly be different and separate from you. Look, am I not able to see my own body? That means the "seer" is definitely separate from the body. Likewise the "seer" is able to see or cognise the mind, the intellect, and the ego(ahamkaara). Hence the "seer" must certainly be beyond the mind and the intellect. It is this "seer" that the vedas and scriptures with one voice proclaim as the "*chakshushaschakshuh, Srotrasya Srotram*" — eye of the eye, ear of the ear etc. This is the real "I" - God, Soul (Aatman) etc...etc. So went the explanation.

85. I stayed there for about a week. Everyday I used to go to the market place. One day, while returning from the market, it started to rain. Not a heavy rain, but a drizzle. But as I was not equipped with an

umbrella or other protection, I was drenched and shivering with cold when I returned to Swamiji's presence. Swamiji had got a good fire going in the room. Even as he noticed me at some distance, he called out "Come here, come quickly and sit down here"; and made me sit near the fire. O, Swamiji, the repository of compassion! But sometimes he is also hard-hearted. "*Vajraadapi Kathoraani, mrdooni Kusumaadapi*". ("Harder than even diamond, and softer than even a flower (are the hearts of great men)"). This, it is said, is the characteristic of the hearts of great personalities. I have seen this clearly manifest in Swamiji on several occasions.

86. I was enjoying the pleasant warmth of the fire. I began stoking the fire. Swamiji's entire attitude changed. He began to scold me. Swamiji did not in the least like the manner in which I was placing sticks of firewood in the fire. Swamiji is an "artist personified", the very embodiment of art. He had understood fully my utter incompetence. He came and sat down near me with an unbaked wheat chapati in his hand, and asked me: "Do you know how to bake this?" What could I say? Swamiji himself cut the large chapati with a knife into several small pieces and baked them all in the fire. After smearing ghee, he fed us all and he also gave us tea. Scolding me, he says: "Sanyasis should have the skill to do all jobs. How can those who do not know how to do their work in the best possible manner even desire to attain the status of a Sanyasi? All of you may be having your conception of Shri Ramakrishna as an idiot incapable of doing any work. Your idea of

Sanyasa may also be like this". Well, so far so good. He was an extremely competent and proficient person. He used to observe very closely each one of our activities and scold us and correct each of our lapses then and there. When we would be hanging up our washed clothes for drying, he would come to us and show us exactly how they should be spread out. While placing clothes on the clothes-line, he was very particular that they be folded precisely so that all the edges were aligned perfectly and there was no wrinkle or lack of symmetry.

87. "Although Shri Ramakrishna would generally be in meditation and samadhi, his eyes used to notice everything all around him. Cleaning, wiping and polishing everything well; arranging them all tidily in their respective places; sweeping the courtyard; cooking rice; slicing vegetables — these should not be considered petty items of work. If you are able to do all these things with neatness, precision and beauty, then you will acquire the intellectual and other capacities to perform great things in a praise-worthy manner.

88. "Do you have any idea how much of scolding he had to do in training us? Once a (guru)bhai had occasion to buy a cast iron pan from the market and bring it. As that gurubhai was a simpleton, the merchant had cheated him and sold him a broken pan. Shri Ramakrishna understood this the moment he saw the pan. Taking the pan in his hand and tapping it at different points, he demonstrated that, from the very sound, one would know where it was broken. He scolded

the gurubhai a good deal and made him go back and get the pan replaced by a good one".

89. I listen to all this and imbibe it slowly. And slowly a transformation takes place in my ideas. Is it not false self-respect that causes all troubles? It is only now that I get the firm conviction that Swamiji's scoldings constituted priceless good advice designed to eradicate completely my ego and my incompetence. Who indeed can understand the ideas of great men — and how?

90. As per Swamiji's instructions, M.R. and myself started for our home town. Swamiji's instructions were that it was futile to roam about here and there. M.R. left for Tiruvananthapuram and I went to Tiruvalla. Needless to emphasise that my stay with Swamiji in the Nilgiris helped reform and improve my life style a good deal.

91. Staying in Tiruvalla, I used to devote my time and attention exclusively to spiritual matters as before. Gradually people started taking me to other places also for Kirtan, Bhajans and reading of religious texts (paaraayanam). Bhajan Sanghs got established at several places.

92. Once I went to Kanyakumari, worshipped in the temple of the Goddess, and stayed there for a few days. On another occasion, I went to Rameswaram to immerse the ashes of my parents in the sea. There too I stayed for a week. There are several tirthas there. The priests took me to all of them and made me take my bath and

do "bali" (libations to the departed souls). After taking my bath in the "Sethu" I immersed the ashes in the sea. Although these priests harass and pester pilgrims excessively, yet their assistance is inevitable for new comers.

93. I returned to Tiruvalla. A Vedanta Sangh had been established at Tiruvananthapuram with Dr.Tampi as its President. It was to Tiruvananthapuram that the Swamiji came next, accepting the invitation of the Sangh people. This information had been sent to Tiruvalla also. Shri M.R. continued to be the Munsiff at Tiruvalla. Shri Krishna Iyer and Shri C.K.Krishna Pillai were sent as representatives (delegates) to Tiruvananthapuram from Tiruvalla. They proceeded to Tiruvananthapuram and had darshan of Swamiji. They also participated in the activities of the Sangh. During conversation with Swamiji, they happened to mention to him, all on their own, that there was a proposal to set up a Math at Tiruvalla also. Swamiji was extremely pleased to hear this. On return to Tiruvalla, they conveyed this information to M.R., myself and the others. M.R. was an ardent devotee of Swamiji but even so he had not even dreamt of establishing a Math at Tiruvalla. Now he was agitated, thinking what to do. Swamiji having been told, he decided that somehow or the other, the Math must be established.

94. Within a few days, Swamiji would be proceeding to Haripad from Tiruvananthapuram, and from there he would come to Tiruvalla. By then all arrangements must have been made for laying the foundation stone

for the Ashram. But where is the land for the Ashram? And who will give it? These thoughts were uppermost. One day M.R. and myself went to the Paaliakkara Palace. When we apprised the then Head, the Koilthampuran, of the situation, he agreed to give land. The very next day he donated an area of land, part of the Karumaali palace premises, and had the transfer registered.

95. The necessary items of work are in progress on the plot of land. The foundation stone is also getting ready. Swamiji had already reached Haripad. M.R. and myself proceeded to Haripad and had darshan of the Swamiji. We invited Swamiji to lay the foundation stone and returned to Tiruvalla.

96. Day and night we were anxiously awaiting Swamiji's arrival. We decided to celebrate the Annual Day of the Sangh at the local M.G.M.School under Swamiji's Presidentship. The responsibility of writing something about Shri Ramakrishna and reading it out at the function, was entrusted to this humble soul. I had several other responsibilities too. Early in the morning of the day preceding Swamiji's arrival, I got up and scribbled something — God knows what. One fine morning Swamiji and his retinue reached Pulikkeezh ferry in Tiruvalla by a river boat. From dawn, hundreds of people had assembled at the ferry to receive Swamiji. Swamiji was received with due honours and, to the accompaniment of instrumental music, was conducted to M.R.'s house, about 2 miles

(3 km) away. Although a cart was available, Swamiji preferred to walk the entire distance.

97. After a brief rest, Swamiji laid the foundation stone of the would-be Ashram at 10 a.m and the function went off auspiciously. He then returned to M.R.'s house, had food and rested.

98. The meeting of the Sangh started exactly at 4 p.m. Some gentlemen like Haripad Subbaraya Iyer were also present. Swamiji arrived punctually by cart at the School premises. Many people had already congregated there. Swamiji sat down. The welcome address was read. The next item was reading of the item on Shri Ramakrishna. I got up slowly, touched Swamiji's feet and read it out. Later Swamiji mentioned to me: "Everyone was listening with rapt attention to the devotee's write-up. It must be published in book form".

99. Thereafter Swamiji himself addressed the audience as follows: "If any of you has any doubt on spiritual matters, you may ask me". Several questions were asked. The prompt and majestic replies given by Swamiji in his profound voice practically stunned the questioners. Swamiji was endowed, to an exceptional degree, with the skill of silencing his questioners with his resourceful and profound replies.

100. Even now I recall a particular question that had been asked. It was practically an assembly of scholars in session. A prominent teacher asked, "Can a robber be a God?". Swamiji's reply : "No, never, never. A robber

can never be a God". The entire audience burst out into hearty laughter at the nature and sheer force of Swamiji's answer.

101. The same night Swamiji is to leave for Kottayam. That evening also a large number of persons went to M.R.'s house for Swamiji's darshan. After taking leave of them all, Swamiji left by river boat for Kottayam. I too went with him. The next morning we reached Kottayam. Swamiji was to take rest at Shri Padmanabhan Tampi's residence. There also there was a large meeting at 4.P.M. People had come in swelling crowds to listen to Swamiji. Swamiji returned to the residence, had food and left for Bangalore via Ernakulam. I expressed a desire to accompany Swamiji but he rejected it and instructed me to return to Tiruvalla and attend to the construction work of the Ashram. And so I returned to Tiruvalla.

102. Swamiji's next visit to Haripad was for laying the foundation stone of the proposed Ashram there. That was in the Malayalam month of Chingam (Avani in Tamil, August -September in English). I had reached Haripad in advance. On this occasion also, Swamiji would be staying in the Big Palace. Shri Padmanabhan Tampi was First Class Magistrate there. Shri Subbaraya Iyer, Kulathu Mani, Chellappa, myself and a few others were constantly in attendance, serving Swamiji.

103. Meditation Practice used to be conducted every morning at 6 A.M. Only persons particularly interested in meditation were allowed to participate. Swamiji would

sit in front in total silence. Devotees interested in acquiring skill in meditation would prostrate before Swamiji respectfully and sit down in silence in their respective seats. The doors would be closed and there would be pin-drop silence everywhere. After some time, Swamiji would conclude the session with a prayer commencing with OM and ending with the Santi Mantra, and get up. The participants too would leave for their respective places. Then after drinking coffee, Swamiji would get busy in other activities.

104. Several persons continued to come, eager for Swamiji's darshan. Sometimes I too used to convey to Swamiji the ideas and requests/prayers of the non-English knowing visitors. Myself and some others also used to accompany Swamiji on his evening walks. I need not specially mention that this life with Swamiji constituted the seventh heaven of happiness, the greatest of blessings for me.

105. Swamiji used to devote special attention to youngsters. When students from Tiruvalla and other places used to come for Swamiji's darshan, Swamiji used to tell me specially: "Look, these are all good boys. You must take special interest in guiding them on the right path". Many of them have since become Sanyasis.

106. The muhurta time for the foundation stone laying ceremony was the morning of the Ashtami Rohini (Janmashtami) day. The preparations of the function were in progress under Swamiji's directions. Dr. Swami — Swami Chitsukhanandaji—donated a good plot of

land for the Ashram. Early in the morning, a procession started for that place with decorated elephants carrying pictures of Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, to the accompaniment of instrumental music, and with Swamiji himself leading the procession. At the site Bhagavad Gita Paaraayanam and Chandeeapaatham were being conducted. I had been selected to do the Gita paaraayanam. Just as the Gita paaraayanam was over, Swamiji and the procession reached the site.

107. Dr. Tampi, Shri M.R., Shri Velu Pillai and others were also accompanying the procession. The pictures of Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda were placed at an already sanctified spot in the site. Swamiji himself did the puja to them. Then at the appropriate muhurta time, Swamiji himself, with his holy hands, laid the foundation stone. Hari Om.

108. Every one dispersed after distribution of prasad, and Swamiji and his retinue left for the Big Palace. Arrangements had been made there for a big feast. By 12 Noon everybody had taken food after which all rested. At 4 P.M. a public meeting started at the School premises under Swamiji's Presidentship. After speeches by Subbaraya Iyer, Padmanabhan Tampi and others, a collection drive for money began. Swamiji started the drive with his contribution of one rupee. A large amount was promised by the participants there itself.

109. After staying at Haripad for a few more days, Swamiji left by boat for Kollam. I too went with the Swamiji. At Kollam, we stayed at Dr. Raman Tampi's

place. Swamiji always used to enquire about the comfort of the people accompanying him. After staying for a few days at Kollam, we reached Kanyakumari via Thiruvananthapuram, I have been to Kanyakumari before, but the pleasure one derives in travelling with Swamiji is something unique. At Kanyakumari we stayed in the Choultry(Satram). Daily we would go to the temple and worship Goddess Mother and then go to the Vivekananda rock, sit there and meditate. Eventually Swamiji left for Bangalore via Kollam. He sent me back to Tiruvalla.

110. At Tiruvalla the Ashram building was nearing completion. The time fixed for the installation ceremony at Haripad was in the month of Mesha (April - May). Swamiji had instructed that the installation ceremony at Tiruvalla should also be fixed for the same time. Two birds in one shot.

111. A list of prospective donors has been prepared, for collection of money. We go from place to place for collection of money. Construction work is proceeding apace under a contract awarded to one Gopala Pillai. By April the building had almost been completed. The building at Haripad had also been completed. Swamiji had also reached Haripad. I too went there. Swami Visuddhanandaji was also with Swamiji. With great pomp and splendour, the Installation was got done by the holy hands of Swamiji.

112. After resting a while at Haripad, Swamiji reached Tiruvalla along with Swami Visuddhanandaji. Here too,

there were processions and other arrangements. The Installation was on Akshaya Tritiya day. Following this there was a very profound speech by Swamiji. Lawyer Shri Kunjirama Menon from Parappanangadi translated the speech very interestingly for the benefit of the non-English knowing audience. Swamiji entrusted me with the responsibility of staying in the Ashram itself — accepting alms (bhiksha); doing one's own cooking (swayampaaka); performing the daily pujas and neivedyam; training young persons to become Brahmacharis; practising Dharmic principles and popularising them among the public; and other multifarious duties and activities. Swamiji then left for Bangalore via Chengannur and Kollam.(1913 AD).

113. Now I had a place where I could pursue my spiritual life freely and without interference. Whenever I worshipped at the Tiruvalla temple, I used to cherish a great desire to get close to the idol, offer puja to it and prostrate before it inside the Sanctum. All those desires have now been fulfilled. Although I was staying all alone in the Ashram, some youngsters used to come and help — Raman Pillai, Padmanabha Pillai, Govinda Pillai and so on. Swamiji had already instructed me to devote special attention to their training. Guests also used to come frequently. M.R. too used to come with his family and participate in the pujas. In the evenings, at the meditation, kirtan and Bhajan sessions, 8 to 10 persons, and on special occasions, even larger numbers, used to participate. In between, there will be special pujas done as offerings by people. On such occasions people used to come from other places like Maannaar, Kaviyoor etc and participate in the Bhajan and feeding. On Sundays I used to go to places such as Peringara, Muthur, Mepraal, etc and instil a sense of devotion to duty among students.

114. Every year we used to celebrate the birth anniversary days of Shri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. The Annual Festival used to be conducted generally only when Swamiji used to visit the Ashram. And Swamiji continued to give darshan each year. It was the time that I spent in Swamiji's company that created devotion and strength on an ever-increasing scale from day to day in me.

*"Kilbisham okkeyum pokkuvaanulloru
Siddhoushadham Mahat paada seva
Sraddhayaay cheykilo chitham thelinjaasu
Bhaktiyum Muktiyum Labhyamaakum"*

(Meaning of this Malayalam verse: "The one great medicine that will help in getting rid of all one's sins is serving the feet of great persons. If this is done with sincere devotion, ere long the mind will become pure and one will attain devotion and liberation" - Tr) Swamiji is a pure-hearted person. He is incapable of hiding anything. Whatever is on his mind will come bursting out. Everything was public; nothing was secret. He would always be closely watching everybody's activities, particularly mine. He would not correct my mistakes then and there. He would scold me severely and correct my mistakes only when there were several people around to witness it. On certain occasions he would even pick up a stick to beat me. I shall cite just one example here — The birth anniversary festival of Swami Vivekananda is in progress. A large public meeting under Swamiji's Presidentship is arranged at the Girls' school. After several eminent persons had spoken, in my capacity as Secretary, I too spoke something. Swamiji did not like the tone or tenor of what I said. On conclusion of the meeting we returned to the Ashram. There also there were lots of people. People used to have some affection and regard for me. Immediately on reaching the Ashram, I prepare coffee for Swamiji and approach Swamiji with a glassful of coffee in my hand. Swamiji used to like only black coffee, and it must be piping hot. Swamiji had taught me several times the

proper way of making coffee and tea. Well, I was standing close to Swamiji with the glassful of coffee in my hand. And, looking at me, he began roaring at me like a lion: "Well! you are posing yourself as a Bhakta? You are a false Bhakta. Try to become a true Bhakta. And why do you care for these Ashrams made of stone and timber? Build the Ashram in your own heart and instal Guru Maharaj there". (Translator's note: The above English version of Swamiji's words has been given by Guru Maharaj himself, followed by a translation in Malayalam.) What divine words! But I did not quite relish these immortal, honeyed words then. What else but my ego could have been the reason for that? It is only now that I am able to savour and enjoy the flavour and sweetness of those nectar-like words.

115. Swamiji had his coffee and rested. I become engaged in other items of work. After staying here for some days, Swamiji left to visit Maannar, Haripad, Kollam, Thiruvananthapuram and Kanyakumari, and then left for Bangalore. Within Travancore, I used to accompany Swamiji on all such visits. On such occasions I would entrust the responsibility of running the Ashram to some one else before leaving.

116. Although the Ashram building at Tiruvalla offered practically no conveniences for the Swamiji's stay, he nevertheless used to come and stay there for 4-5 days at a stretch each year. I had become quite distressed at the inconvenience and discomfort to Swamiji. Always I used to think of constructing another more spacious and comfortable building for Swamiji's stay. Then I

happened to run into Veliath Aasaan. He was a member of an old Nair family. He had lots of landed property, but Lakshmi, the Goddess of prosperity, never stays at a place permanently. The land is all in the hands of others now; and all he has got now is an elevated piece of barren land in Thokalassery. The place was ideal for an Ashram. The moment I apprised Aasaan of our requirements, he gladly agreed to donate the land to us. After getting Swamiji's approval we got the registration transferred to us. During one of Swamiji's visits to Tiruvalla, I took him to the site and he liked it very much.

117. And so time moves on, "*Kaalo na yaato vayameva yaataah*". In truth it is not time which moves but we who keep on moving forward and approach death.

118. Swamiji used to write regularly. In one letter he had written: "I intend to escort the President Maharaj to Kanyakumari. All arrangements must be made for his reception and stay at various places in a befitting manner. I shall intimate to you in due course the date of his arrival". I experienced both happiness and trepidation on reading this. The financial state of the Tiruvalla Ashram is deplorable. The Ashram was just limping along somehow. I had no desire to accumulate a corpus fund to finance the daily expenses. "*Artham Anartham*" (Wealth is misery and trouble - Tr). Be that as it may, I was fortunate to send a small amount towards the travel expenses of President Maharaj. I received a letter that, shortly, Maharaj and his retinue would be reaching Alwaye railway station. I reached

Alwaye. I think that was in 1916. Padmanabhan Tampi and others had already arrived at Alwaye and fixed up a good house near the (Periyar) river for Maharaj and party to stay.

119. Myself and the others were at the Alwaye railway station, eagerly awaiting the arrival of the train which would be bringing Maharaj and party. The train steamed in around 4 P.M. It is impossible to describe the excitement and agitation of the people. First Swamiji alighted from the train. The Maharaj(*) got down slowly. Everyone prostrated before him. What I am blessed with is indeed the darshan of a Mahatma. He appeared to be the very embodiment of divine peace. Maharaj had brought with him 3 or 4 Sanyasis, 2 Brahmacharis and a cook. Under Swamiji's instructions Kunjirama Menon, Appu Menon, Narayanan Nair and other devotees had assembled *en route*.

120. All of us reached the residence fixed up for President Maharaj. Swamiji tells me: "Look, it is your God who has come. You will now receive your Mantradeeksha and other things". Although I had been with Swamiji for 4 - 5 years, not a word had so far fallen from his lips regarding meditation or Mantropadesa. On hearing Swamiji's words I became

* This was Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj (who was known as Rakhal and Sri Maharaj), a very devoted disciple of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the first President of the Shri Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math - Tr.

radiantly happy and became doubly interested and immersed in serving Maharaj. I also tried my utmost to please and satisfy the other Swamiji's in Maharaj's party.

121. With Maharaj, besides Nirmalananda Swamiji, Sankarananda Swamiji, Durgananda Swamiji, Bhumananda Swamiji and Yateeswarananda Swamiji, and Brahmachari Gopal were also there. Sankarananda Swamiji is the present President. Yateeswarananda Swamiji is now in the Bangalore Ashram.

122. Maharaj is staying comfortably at Alwaye. He is reclining in an easy chair facing the river. Devotees keep on coming for his darshan. Maharaj is always in meditation. He is never in the habit of talking much. Still he used to speak sometimes a few words about the greatness of famous temples and pilgrimage centres and of the holiness of Brindavan and other places. This makes everyone happy. Even his darshan confers great bliss. Just imagine how much more the bliss would be enhanced if the nectar of his speech were to be added to his darshan!

123. It became my habit to go and stand near Maharaj whenever I could find the time. It became physically impossible to pull back my eyes once they had fallen on the physical beauty of Maharaj's body. Once when I was feasting my eyes continuously with the glory of his sight, he beckoned me beside him and asked: "What do you want? What do you want?". All it struck me to request him was that I would like to have the sandals

adorning his lotus feet. On hearing this the Master (God) said: "These are leather chappals. On my return to Calcutta I shall send you the wooden paadukas I had been using". And straightaway he instructed Sankarananda Swamiji who was his Private Secretary to arrange for the paadukas being sent to me.

124. After staying at Alwaye comfortably for 2-3 days although it was raining, Swamiji left one night for Kottayam by a special steam boat. Rain and wind were very much in evidence and the boat started rocking this side and that side. But President Maharaj consoled everybody; and the party reached Kottayam safe and sound the next morning. They stayed in a bungalow arranged by Padmanabhan Tampi. He stayed there only for one or two days. From Kottayam President Maharaj left for Haripad in a special car along with his Private Secretary and Padmanabhan Tampi. Myself and some others left by steam boat. Many people had congregated at various places on the route to receive President Maharaj.

125. Around 4 P.M. President Maharaj reached Haripad. Elaborate arrangements had been made to receive him at Haripad and escort him to the Ashram. It was the ardent desire of the organisers to carry him in a palanquin to the accompaniment of vedic chanting, Poorna Kumbham, Kirtan, Nagaswaram music etc., but Maharaj did not agree to any of these. He said, "What for are these arrangements? Am I being led to my marriage?" At the Haripad Ashram he rested well. Myself and the others reached Haripad around 8 P.M.

by steam boat. I went direct to President Maharaj and prostrated before him. After having darshan of the Swamiji also, I ate and slept well.

126. Maharaj stayed in the Haripad Ashram very comfortably indeed. Swamiji was ever around, ready at hand, anticipating Maharaj's least wish and requirement and having it fulfilled. With what utter devotion does Swamiji treat Maharaj? This can only be understood by actually being there and witnessing things. After allotting the best available sleeping places to the Sanyasis and Brahmacharis accompanying Maharaj, Swamiji would sleep in a corner of the enclosed verandah. Devotees continue to come for darshan from neighbouring places in batches. Swamiji tells me, "Look, tomorrow morning Maharaj will give you Mantradeeksha. You be ready. It is desirable to skip food at night. In the morning too, you should take even water only after the Mantropadesa. Take a very early bath in the morning and be ready. You must keep flowers and fruits in your hands. If you do not have money, I shall give you". I was immensely happy. I had some money with me. Swamiji had told similarly to some others too, and all of them also got ready. I too went to the market and procured flowers, fruits, sandal paste, incense sticks etc. The entire night I spent with this single thought. In the morning, after completing my bath, I kept standing near the puja room. Maharaj had already graced the puja room with his presence early in the morning. Shri Sankarananda Swamiji was standing at the door of the puja room. Our Swamiji too was there with him. Swamiji called me first and directed

me to go into the puja room. After prostrating before Swami Sankaranandaji, I went inside the room. What an enchanting sight! Dakshinamurthy himself, rapt in meditation. I prostrated before Maharaj. Under his instructions I remained in the seat fixed for me. After Aachamana and other preliminaries, the Mantropadesa was given to me. I was at the pinnacle of Bliss. After offering the flowers etc at Maharaj's feet, and prostrating before him, I stepped out of the room without a care in the world. Then I remained for a very long time in Maharaj's bed room, immersed in japa and meditation.

127. A grand feast at 12 Noon. The very next day. Maharaj leaves for Kollam. I too go with him. Night had fallen by the time we reached the house fixed for stay by Dr. Tampi. The stay there was for 3 days. The next lap of the journey was to Thiruvananthapuram.

128. Swamiji had deputed 4 or 5 young men to Thiruvananthapuram to make the necessary arrangements there. Maharaj and party reached Thiruvananthapuram by car one evening. And myself and some others reached by bus. That was an auspicious day. The next day was Triikkaartika day. The entire building was adorned by chains of lighted oil lamps. President Maharaj had to do a foundation stone laying at Thiruvananthapuram.

129. There is a place called Vattiyoorkaavu about 4-5 miles (6-8 km) from Thiruvananthapuram. There was a beautiful hillock there. Swamiji was keen to get an

Ashram constructed atop that hill. Through the persuasions of Shri Banerjee, an Engineer of the State Government and of Shri Ghosh, a Government contractor, the owner of the land agreed to donate the major portion of the area for the Ashram. Mr. Varier of Peroorkada (a part of Thiruvananthapuram city) and Dr. Tampi were also interested in the project. The auspicious time fixed for the foundation stone laying ceremony was the morning of the second day after Maharaj's arrival in Thiruvananthapuram. The previous night itself Swamiji reached the site and performed some homas and pujas. Very early in the morning President Maharaj reached the Ashram site by car. Myself and the others followed — some on foot and others by horse-drawn carriages. Many people managed to reach the site. Public welcome addresses were offered to President Maharaj in English and Sanskrit. For the foundation stone laying ceremony, Swami Yateeswaranandaji performed the puja under Maharaj's instructions. Thereafter, Maharaj laid the foundation stone with his holy hands. Prasadam was distributed to everyone. A group photo was taken then. A copy of that photograph may be seen even now in some Ashrams.

130. One by one the people disperse. President Maharaj sits down there on a chair. He likes the place very much. I was standing close to him. He tells me; "Devotee, what an enchanting place this is! This is indeed a fit place for Saadhana and Bhajan. You must stay here and make some young men Brahmacharis (tyagis)".

131. The principal object of Maharaj's Kerala tour was to worship Kumaari (Mother Goddess Parvati in virgin, maiden form) at Kanyakumari. To realise that, after food and a short rest, Maharaj started for Kanyakumari the same day by car. He reached by the evening. Myself and the others joined him a little later. A good house had been fixed up for his stay. His party also stayed there along with him. Myself and the others stayed in the nearby choultry (satram).

132. In the evening itself Maharaj started for the temple on foot to have darshan of the Goddess at the evening Deepaaraadhana (Aarti) time. All of us followed, singing Kirtans and bhajans. Maharaj was totally silent. Swamiji was also near him. We entered the temple and approached the sanctum sanctorum. At the darshan of the jewel-bedecked, bewitchingly beautiful Goddess who sustains the entire Universe, Maharaj stood in a trance, forgetting everything else. O, Bliss Absolute! All of us felt rewarded.

133. After receiving prasad when Maharaj was about to return to the residence, several maidens (Kumaaris) began to approach Maharaj and extend their hands to him. Swamiji was ever-ready beside Maharaj, with the money-bag. Swamiji began placing coins in Maharaj's hands one after another, and Maharaj started distributing them one by one to the Kumaris. This army of maidens followed Maharaj upto his residence, and then dispersed. This used to happen every day. During the day-time also, children used to come to Maharaj's residence. Sometimes Maharaj used to give

them eatables with his own hands. All of us enjoyed Maharaj enacting humorous scenes and laughing and playing with the children as though he was himself a child and was enjoying himself immensely.

134. One day a Kumari Puja was performed there. All the Kumaris were presented with fine clothes, fed well and made happy. These maidens sang and danced merrily and returned to their houses. Through feeding of young ones God is pleased. This is indeed true.

135. President Maharaj and party and his devotees stayed at Kanyakumari for a whole week. Whenever I got the opportunity, I used to be near Maharaj. One day Maharaj graced me with these words: "Ah, what a delightful place! I do not want to go back from here at all. If only a hut of leaves (parasaala) had been put up here, I would have stayed here in perfect contentment for the rest of my life". Consider critically the mental make-up of great persons. Their sojourn in this world is like a "lotus leaf on water". *Padmapatram iva ambhasi*. Just as the water does not cling to the lotus leaf, so also material things do not touch their hearts. Can sense experiences ever approach these blessed, fortunate souls who ever revel in eternal Brahmananda? No, never!

136. Swamiji had only one all-consuming thought — to give complete satisfaction to President Maharaj and party. Whenever Swamiji had a little leisure, I used to go and sit somewhere near him. He knew all the arts and sciences. I have already made a mention of this.

One day myself and the others were sitting beside Swamiji. He started calling us one by one and began reading our palms. He called me too, and the moment he looked at my palm, he said; "Bhakta will go into a cave and go on meditating and meditating".

137. The stay at Kanyakumari was coming to an end. Before leaving Kanyakumari, Maharaj gave Mantropadesa to some persons. One Padmanabha Pillai who had returned from Germany and the present Sukhananda Swamiji were two of those fortunate ones.

138. In those days Shri Thanu Pillai was the P.W.D. Engineer at Nagercoil (a town about 15 miles or 24 kilometres to the north of Kanyakumari - Tr.). He was also a devotee. He invited and took President Maharaj to Nagercoil. I too went along. Arrangements had been made for a grand feast. After food and rest at night at Nagercoil, Maharaj left for Kollam the next morning.

139. This time Maharaj stayed at Kollam for 5-6 days. Dr. Tampi had even earlier received upadesa from Maharaj. He was very keen to carry out Maharaj's wishes. It was here that Maharaj gave Mantropadesa to Swami Agamanandaji and others. And also to an Engineer.

140. Subbaraya Iyer and Brahmachari Chellappa arrived at Kollam from Haripad. They had come with great hopes and desire of taking Maharaj once again to Haripad. Maharaj too was happy to go to Haripad, but

he found himself unable to comply with their request as he had to get back to Calcutta without delay.

141. Maharaj was ready to leave for Ernakulam by a special steam boat. I had had absolutely no rest for quite some time and my body had weakened. But the strength and power that my mind had received, were something unique.

*"Kilbisham okkeyum pokkuvaanulloru
Siddhoushadham mahat paada seva
Sraddhayaay cheykilo Chitham telinjaasu
Bhaktiyum Muktiyum Labhyamaakum
Suddha Bhaktiyum Muktiyum labhyamaakum".*

(The meaning of this Malayalam verse has been given in para 114)

*"Durlabham trayamevaitat deivaanugrahaahai-
tukam
Manushyatvam, Mumukshutvam, Mahaapuru-
shasamsrayah".*

(Meaning: All these three things are only rarely got, and then too, only with God's blessings —birth as a human being; desire for liberation; and the company of, and the opportunity to serve, great men - Tr.)

142. This humble soul was engrossed in serving President Maharaj continuously day and night as though it were God Himself that he was serving. I had devotion even for the Maharaj's cook. Once during our stay in

Kanyakumari, I happened to notice the cook's clothes lying on the bank of the tank. As soon as I started washing those clothes, Yateeswarananda Swamiji came there. I was washing the clothes voluntarily. Yateeswarananda Swamiji, however, mistook that I had been washing the clothes under the cook's instructions, and he told me: "What are you doing? He (the cook) is taking too much advantage of your leniency". Scolding the cook, he pulled out the clothes from my hands and threw them away. I do not think the cook ever came to know of this.

143. As you know, I am an "Aadyavasaanavesha" (i.e. One who will be on the scene before all others, and will be the last one to leave the scene - Tr). I begin taking food only after all the others have been served and have been satisfied. On some rare occasions when there were more people than had been anticipated and provided for, I would even go without food. On such occasions, I would run up to a hotel, eat and come back. It was very easy to please President Maharaj, but very difficult to please some of the young Sanyasis in his party. This is what happened at Kollam once. One day, single-handed, I was serving food for about 16 persons. Bhumananda Swamiji asked for some salt. By mistake, what I gave him was sugar. It was not that he did not have affection for me, but on this occasion he started scolding me harshly, asking me why I had given sugar when he had asked for salt. Swamiji was sitting next to him. The moment he heard the unnecessary scolding, Swamiji started shouting at him like a lion: "What, have you no eyes to see? Striving and serving, he is

reduced to a skeleton. He might have made a mistake. But this is not the way to behave towards him." All the wild animals became thoroughly quiet. Everybody finished his meal in total silence and returned to his respective place.

144. I have discussed this incident only to illustrate and emphasise Swamiji's compassion to those who serve him. I am reminded here of Sri Krishna who, totally forgetting his solemn promise, jumped out of his chariot and flew straight to Bhishmacharya, with the Sudarsana Chakra in hand.

145. Well, the next morning President Maharaj is scheduled to leave for Ernakulam by a special steam boat. I had a great desire to go with him to Calcutta. I was sure Maharaj would agree to my prayer. But how could I go without Swamiji's permission? The moment Swamiji heard me speak of my desire to go to Calcutta, he asked — "If you go away, who would be here to look after my work, the Ashram etc?" I had no answer to this. Early in the morning itself, I prepared coffee. Swamiji walked to the boat jetty even before taking coffee. I was stunned. Leaving the coffee as it was in the fire-place, I ran to the boat jetty and got into the boat. Swamiji asked — "Where is the coffee?" I ran back and fetched the coffee and offered it to everyone. Swamiji was happy.

146. The boat started moving. About 12 Noon, we reached Trikkunnappuzha. Subbaraya Iyer and Chellappa were there, awaiting Maharaj's arrival with

food ready at hand. The time approached for me to take leave of President Maharaj and his party and Swamiji. With the blessings of Maharaj and Swamiji, I got down from the boat. Within 4-5 minutes, the boat vanished from sight. Siva Siva!

147. How can I describe my state? Just like plunging all of a sudden from dazzling light into the depths of darkness in a dense forest! I managed to nibble at some food. Along with Chellappa Swami, I reached the Haripad Ashram and rested.

OM! OM! OM!

CHAPTER - 7

148. The next morning itself I left for Tiruvalla via Pallippaad. At Pallippaad there was a small but beautiful Krishna Temple belonging to the Koikkal people. Earlier I had done Bhajana worship in that temple for a month or two. Once I had conducted a Bhagavata Saptaha also there. The owners of the temple, Shri Govinda Pillai and Shri Velu Pillai, were known to me.

149. I returned to Tiruvalla and continued to look after the affairs of the Ashram. My mind was immersed in the various incidents during the stay and travels of President Maharaj. Immediately after reaching Calcutta, Maharaj had sent me the wooden sandals used by him. I used to do puja to the sandals with great devotion. They are even now in the Ashram at Tiruvalla.

150. Diverse emotions arise in me when I think of Maharaj's words dripping with honey. When will I be fortunate again to hear those nectar-like words and receive his darshan? Once one of the Swamijis was applying oil on Maharaj's body. I too wished to do that. Approaching Maharaj and standing behind him, I too started applying oil on his back. Laughingly, Maharaj asked: "What is Bhakta doing? Painting?" I was applying the oil very gently. What was to be done was to apply the oil and thoroughly massage the area vigorously. I did not know this.

151. Maharaj was always in meditation (Samadhi). Whenever I used to go near him, he would say: "Meditate, Meditate, no time to lose". The mind becomes tranquil as soon as Maharaj comes near. Such was the glorious vibration and experience that he used to generate. I used to go to his presence constantly. Once Maharaj was lying down on a cot in the Ashram at Haripad. This scene continues to be ever fresh in my mind.

*"Karaaravindena Padaaravindam Mukhaaravinde
Vinivesayantam
Vatasya Patrasya Pute Sayaanam Baalam
Mukundam Manasaa Smaraami".*

(Meaning: "I recall in my mind that Baala Mukunda who, with his lotus hand is placing his lotus foot in his lotus mouth, and who is reclining on the back of a banyan leaf" - Tr.) Maharaj was exactly like that.

*"Kotiyugangalilaayi sanchayicheedunna
punyaphalamaanee martyajanmam
Theduvin Sadguru Paadapadmam Punarneduvin
Sowbhaagya Jnaanaamritam".*

(For the meaning of this Malayalam verse please see para 72 above - Tr.)

152. I was now mostly staying in the Tiruvalla Ashram. Occasionally I used to go to Haripad and Thiruvananthapuram. Whenever Swamiji used to come to Tiruvalla, I used to be with him always, engaged in

serving him until the moment of his return. Swamiji used to exert himself very much to complete the Thiruvananthapuram Ashram at the earliest. The inauguration of the fund raising campaign for that Ashram was held at Thiruvananthapuram one night. Swamiji himself entered his name as the first donor in the donation register and gave one rupee in cash on the spot. At that time itself promises were received for donations aggregating Rs.2,000/-. Peroorkada Rama Varier was one of Swamiji's ardent devotees. He was ready to do anything for the Ashram. Entrusting the responsibility to him and others, Swamiji left for Kanyakumari and from there for Bangalore.

153. Swamiji used to write to me off and on. In one letter, he wrote: "Bhakta, you go to Thiruvananthapuram. They are all sleeping, Wake them up". I went immediately to Thiruvananthapuram, met all the devotees and communicated Swamiji's stricture to them. All of them tried to exert as much as they could. They had already collected the necessary stone, timber and other materials needed for construction work. I stayed at the Ashram site itself for 3 days. A totally deserted place. Mr. Arunachalam Pillai, the owner of the site, was residing with his family at the foot of the hill. He used to send me food regularly. I used to take food only once a day. I stayed 3 very comfortable and happy days there. On the morning of the third day, Shri Banerjee, Engineer, arrived around 9 A.M. Everyone felt happy at this. He inspected the site immediately, identified the exact spot where the building would be constructed, and had pegs driven to demarcate

the various areas. The chief of the construction labour was also with him and work started on that day itself. I then went to Kanyakumari, had darshan of the Goddess and returned to Tiruvalla. I apprised Swamiji of all the details. Needless to say, he was extremely pleased.

154. Swamiji devoted special attention to the Thiruvananthapuram Ashram. It was his wish that the Installation ceremony should also be got performed by President Maharaj. Swamiji himself used to proceed to various places for collection of funds. Frequently he used to go to Thiruvananthapuram also. The walls were being erected. Large stone pillars, chiselled to fine smoothness, were being hoisted and positioned. I too used to accompany Swamiji and watch all this. A splendid feast was held at Swamiji's residence, in order to enthuse the carpenters, masons and workers.

155. On that occasion, Swamiji happened to stay at Thiruvananthapuram for quite some days. Only I was with him. Although Swamiji used to be involved in all this hectic hustle and bustle, his mind was ever at peace. Swamiji told me with great delight: "Bhakta, look what a deserted and isolated place this is! How much happiness it gives us because there is none else! Here one can remember god to one's heart's content. We can sing aloud; we can dance. Who is there to witness or hear us?"

156. Shri C.K. Krishna Pillai, Magistrate, was also a great devotee of Swamiji's. We went to his residence in

response to his invitation. From there to Kanyakumari; and from there to Kollam.

157. A "Yoga Math" had been established at a place called Quilandy in Northern Malabar as a result of the interest taken by some prominent persons there. The principal members and office bearers of the Math were Shri Krishnan Nair, Kelappan Kidavu, Ittitarappa Menon and others. In 1915 they offered the Math to Swamiji. When this offer was made, I too had been to Quilandy. From that day onwards, the Math became transformed as the Ramakrishna Ashram. Swamiji was looking for a suitable person to run the Ashram and the Sanskrit school under it. And he selected me for the assignment.

158. At that time a few Brahmacharis happened to come to the Ashram at Tiruvalla. Shri Raman Pillai (Sekharananda Swamiji), Raman Pillai (Chitbhaasaananda Swamiji), Padmanabha Pillai (Nirvikarananda Swamiji), Paachu Pillai, Sankara Iyer and so on. One day Swamiji happened to tell Dr. Tampi and others. "I am going to instal Bhakta at Quilandy". A change from my native place Tiruvalla was something I liked. "Then you go to Quilandy today itself", ordered Swamiji. Telling me not to accept any money from Dr. Tampi even if offered, and giving me ten rupees himself, he sent me to the boat jetty along with another person.

159. From Kollam to Ernakulam. From Ernakulam to Parappanangadi by train. Lawyer Shri Kunjirama

Menon was staying there. He was a great devotee of Swamiji and was considerably interested in the affairs of the Ashram. After staying with him for one or two days, one evening I reached Quilandy. An incident which happened immediately after my arrival there is worth mentioning here. The moment he saw me from a distance, a Brahmachari — Aasaan — das towards me like an arrow and prostrat before me on the ground. Then he quickly climbed up a coconut tree, plucked a tender coconut, broke it open and keeping it in his hands, came and stood before me, ready to make me drink the contents. O, the goodness of true love and affection! Then I conversed with Shri Krishnan Nair who was staying there as the Head of the Math, other Brahmacharis, teachers and students, and then rested. After bath, prayers, meditation and food, I slept well at night.

160. I have now to say certain things about the Ashram. I have already mentioned that the Math had already been offered to Swamiji. Despite that, it was Shri Krishnan Nair who continued to administer it. He used to live in the Ashram itself. When I reached there, 3 Brahmacharis were also staying there. They used to attend to Krishnan Nair; Krishnan Nair used to treat them as mere attendants or workmen. Krishnan Nair also had a wife; she was living in a place nearby, on land belonging to the Ashram. I wondered very much within myself whether my being sent to Quilandy was really not for the purpose of ensuring that the Ashram properties were physically taken over from Shri Krishnan Nair and handed over to Swamiji. There was

a small Sanskrit School under the control of the Ashram, for which a small grant used to be received from Government, Swamiji had not sent me here just like that. He had provided me with the necessary strength to attend to all these items of work too.

161. I entered upon my duties right from the next day after reaching Quilandy. I devoted attention first to education. I started befriending the students. The children too were happy with me. And their number increased. I became the Head Master; I started teaching them a little bit of the English language also. When the Inspector of Schools came for inspection, he too was happy and increased the grant by Rs.25/-.

162. Gradually Krishnan Nair's Managership of the Ashram got transferred to me. And eventually Krishnan Nair gave up connection with management of the Ashram and started living with his wife in their own house. Nevertheless he used to come now and then and tried to find out what was going on. Swamiji continued to visit the Ashram once a year. He was very happy.

163. As instructed by Swamiji, I used to attend to the Ashram work personally. Some prominent persons who had all along been nursing the feeling of "I, I, Mine, Mine" towards the Ashram, started nurturing hostility towards me. When they found that they had no voice, they started making efforts to regain control and possession of the Ashram. They tried to get one of their Guruswami's to stay in the Ashram. They sought my permission to do so. As I could anticipate their real

intention, I refused permission, saying that no one could be accommodated without Swamiji's prior permission. They did not like this in the least, and I may say that their displeasure and hostility increased hundred-fold. The Brahmacharis who were with me were also on the point of leaving. I was all alone. The students had to be taught; poojas had to be performed; food had to be prepared; things had to be purchased from the market; and occasionally the Post Office too had to be visited. I used to attend to all these diverse functions single-handed without fail.

164. When things were going on like this, one day a student — the son of the priest in the near by temple — comes and tells me in secret: "Swamiji, yesterday lots of people had come to the temple. They are all trying to drive you away from here. They had a tea-party and all that. What they intend to do is to enter the Ashram this evening and take it over by force". I received this information calmly. My strength is really that of Swamiji's. "Let them come" is all that I said in reply to the boy. I had perforce to go to the Post Office that evening. I did not experience any fear. Thinking that, if they came, they should not experience any difficulty in entering. I kept the front gate and the front door to the Ashram wide open. It would take me one and a half hours to go to the Post Office and return. I had a firm conviction, deep inside me that, without my permission, not even a child will enter the open Ashram premises. And it happened exactly like that. When I returned from the Post Office, all was quiet exactly as it was when I had left. The power of truth

is something special. The blessings of the preceptor also have indeed a unique power. I used to feel that Swamiji was constantly beside me on those occasions. It is worth mentioning that incidents such as these served to increase my faith and devotion.

165. Various difficulties continued to arise in the working of the Quilandy Ashram. That was the time of the First German (World) War. The prices of rice and other commodities rose very sharply; and there were four or five people to be fed daily in the Ashram. I used to think sometimes that even if one could consume the water in which rice had been washed, one would be fortunate. Tears used to stream from my eyes; and the next moment a solution would be in sight and the problem would be solved. There has been no such incident thereafter.

166. For some time, lawyer Shri Kunjirama Pathiyaar — Swami Chinmayananda — stayed in the Ashram. He was a devotee as well as a detached soul. He used to teach the students in the school. That was of great help to me. His desire was to renounce everything and continue to live in Ashrams. Nevertheless he had to return at once from Quilandy to his native house. Winding up his legal practice, Kunjirama Pathiyaar became the Editor of the Malayalam newspaper "Kudiyaan" (Tenant) in Pattaambi. Later he was Principal of the Pattambi Sanskrit College for a long time. In the end he became a Sanyasi.

167. Swamiji used to send young Brahmacharis to help

me when I was alone in the Ashram. Once Ramasaranam Sekharananda Swamiji was staying with me. That would have been in 1919. Swamiji's letters used to arrive regularly. My desire to go to Bangalore and stay with Swamiji kept on increasing. If I were to ask for permission to do so, it would be denied. One day I sent a letter to Swamiji in the form of a poem intimating that I was leaving for Bangalore to see him. And, entrusting the entire responsibility of running the Ashram to the Brahmachari, I left for Bangalore. By 9 A.M. in the morning, I reached Bangalore Ashram. Swamiji had finished his coffee and was engaged in the garden.

168. It was Swamiji's practice to get up very early in the morning, finish his morning ablutions, prepare coffee, take it himself and serve the rest to the other residents in the Ashram. The vessels also would be cleaned by him and arranged tidily in their respective places. He would then have a smoke and proceed to the garden, armed with gardening implements. Swamiji would observe total silence while doing these things - Peace! Peace! "*Yad Yad karma karomi tad tad akhilam Sambho tavaaraadhanam*". (Whatever I do, O, Siva, it is an act of worship to you" - Tr.). Wise ones could learn this principle from every moment of Swamiji's life. Is not yoga the skill to do things efficiently and perfectly? Swamiji was indeed a true devotee, Yogi, Jnaani (Knower) and Karmi (Doer). All this becomes fully clear to me only at this late stage in life.

169. Swamiji would finish his work — rather puja — in

the garden by 11 A.M. Then he would take his bath; he would wash his clothes himself and hang them out to dry. With precision and neatness. Then, imbibing teertha (prasad water) from the puja room, he would go and sit in the place allotted to him for food. All the Brahmacharis and Sanyasis in the Ashram would also sit along with him in formation (in a line). A smoke again after food; then rest. At 3 P.M. after washing himself, he would have tea along with fruit or snacks. That was the time when people would generally come and salute him. He would welcome students with love and affection, talk to them in a profound voice, and satisfy them all. After participating in the evening Deepaaraadhana (Aarti), and after finishing food, he would fall into a relaxed slumber. I have been fortunate to sleep beside him in his own room.

*"Kilbisham okkeyum pokkuvaanulloru
Siddhoushadham mahatpaada seva.*

*Sraddhayaay cheykilo chitham thelinjaasu
Bhakityum Muktiyum labhyamaakum"*

(For meaning please see para 114 above - Tr). Well, where am I? Yes, I am carrying some gifts in my hands. I know Swamiji's temperament very well. It is with great trepidation that I am approaching Swamiji. And that too, from the backside. Swamiji is deeply immersed in his work. Once he turned back and looked. I fell at Swamiji's feet. "Who asked you to come here?" he scolds me in an angry tone. And he started repeating excerpts from my poem in a sarcastic voice.

170. I was extremely distressed. At that time I could not understand Swamiji's external behaviour. I did not have the capacity, in those days, of understanding the internal workings of Swamiji's heart which overflowed with love and affection. It is only now that I have been able to realise that these were words of blessings, disguised to make me stronger.

171. I was thinking what I should do — should I leave the place? In any case, I slowly walked up to the door and slowly slipped outside. The sight that I saw there is ever fresh in my memory. An extensive forest area — desolate and deserted surroundings — I am all alone there — None to help me - except God. With this approach, I received adequate strength and intelligence. I returned to the Ashram itself. Swamiji was also enquiring - "Where is Bhakta?" Swamiji was very happy. And I continued to stay there itself, in the Ashram.

172. President Maharaj (i.e. the First President — Swami Brahmanandaji — whom I had served at Tiruvalla and other places) is reported to have said like this about Swamiji: "He is a terrible man. But he is a great devotee as well". To the question, how exactly can diametrically opposite characteristics like light and darkness co-exist in a person, Swamiji's life furnished a convincing and eloquent answer. I stayed there in near-ecstasy for 3-4 days. One day Swamiji tells me: "Bhakta, why not you go to Tiruvalla and take charge of the Ashram there? They are all yearning for you". This was nothing short of an order. And I accepted that gladly. I decided to leave the next day.

173. Swamiji ordered me to write some letters to devotees in North Malabar. I began to write. Swamiji formally made me sit in his own chair. It was a well-rounded chair, the Swamiji's favourite one. What could I do? I had to sit down in that chair and write the letters. Swamiji stood near me and began telling me the things to be written. Look at Swamiji's motherly affection. When I recall all these things, my mind merges in the Swamiji.

174. Swamiji saw me off at 4 P.M. the next day. Under Swamiji's instructions, a Brahmachari, Veeresan, fetched a horse-cab. Swamiji gives new clothes for me as well as for the others in Quilandy and also money for my travel expenses. There is an Ashram in Salem. He gave me some saplings of Bilva plants for being planted in that Ashram *en route* and saw me into the horse-cart for reaching the station. Brahmachari Veeresan also came with me up to the station. On reaching the station, Veeresan put me in the train and returned to the Ashram. Even in those days, Veeresan was a very clever and competent young person. He is known today as Saambhavananda Swamiji.

175. I got down at Salem the next day. I proceeded to the residence of one of Swamiji's great disciples and delivered to him Swamiji's letter. He received me with great affection. The same evening I went to the Ashram. As instructed by Swamiji, I dug up the earth, packed the pit with manure; covered up the whole thing with earth and then planted the saplings. I have never been

to Salem after that. I hear many persons telling that all those saplings have grown into strong trees.

176. The name of Swamiji's devotee in Salem is Namagiri. He introduced me to several eminent persons. I left for Quilandy after staying there for 2-3 days. I got down en route at Pattambi. Just to see Kunjirama Pathiyaar — Swami Chinmayananda — who was so very affectionate to me. From Pattambi I reached Quilandy.

177. It is now the time of Puja (Navaratri; Dusserah). The new clothes given by Swamiji were distributed to all. I narrated everything to the Brahmachari. All of a sudden my mind makes a somersault. Swamiji's instructions were that I should go again to the Tiruvalla Ashram. Tiruvalla is my native place. If I go there, the obstacles in the way of progress in meditation and saadhana will only increase. So the mind is not at all inclined to go there. The scolding received from Swamiji in Bangalore also acts in favour of this. Is it possible to disobey Swamiji's instructions? I deliberated deeply on all these. Immediately I wrote a letter to Swamiji, the substance of which was: "Now I am going not to Tiruvalla but to Gokarnam where I intend to do Tapasya for some time. Whatever I have done was only to please Swamiji. With Swamiji's blessings now I am going. All is false and I cannot rest satisfied until I come face to face with the truth".

178. Having written to Swamiji like this, I myself ran up to the Post Office and posted the letter. It was only

when I returned to the Ashram that I began to analyse my action critically. O, what great foolishness? I felt that I had committed a great crime towards such a great, compassionate and affectionate Swamiji. But I could not refrain from going also. Do I not have a false ego still? The thought that I was not going for a bad purpose but only for worshipping God, gave me some consolation. On Durgashtami day Kumari Puja was performed. And on Vijaya Dasami Day I left Quilandy Ashram. The little money and other things that I had, I entrusted to the Brahmachari. I left without taking a single paisa with me. God alone is my refuge. "*Tvameva Sarvam, mama deva deva*". (O, Lord of Lords, you alone are my everything" - Tr).

179. About 2 miles (3 km) from the Ashram at Quilandy there is a temple of Goddess known as Saarikaa temple. That night I spent happily in the "Kalathattu" of that temple. Leaving the temple the next morning, I arrived at Udipi in 1-2 days. The temple at Udipi is dedicated to Shri Krishna. After darshan of Krishna, I stayed at Udipi for 3 days. It looked impossible to walk all the way upto Gokarnam. As I was advised by some people that it would be better to go to Gokarnam by steam boat from Balachi, I walked upto Balachi. I arrived there one evening and sat waiting for the boat to arrive from Mangalore. I had thought that I could travel free. But it appeared impossible to travel without a ticket. The boat arrived at Balachi. All the travellers got into it and I was the only one left. I explained my situation to the Station Master. He said: "Why didn't you tell me this before? I would have sent you without any difficulty. What is to be done now? Well, how much money do you have?" When I search myself, I somehow discover three rupees on me. The fare to Gokarnam is, I think, five rupees. He made good the deficit himself and got me a ticket. He also gave me 8 annas (50 paise) for buying eatables. I bought beaten rice for 2-3 annas (12-19 paise), got inside the boat and sat down.

180. This was my first ocean voyage. While going to Rameswaram once I had travelled a short distance by sea. I enjoyed the voyage revelling in the various sights. Food is no problem if one has money. All I have with me is some 4-5 annas (25-30 paise) and some beaten

rice. I kept the beaten rice immersed in drinking water, and imbibed that mixture off and on. A lunar eclipse was also approaching. Priests had also got into the boat to get hold of persons from different places. Seeing the costly dress given by Swamiji that I had been wearing, they took me to be a rich person and were troubling me also. My telling them any number of times that I had no money on me, did not convince them. One of them stuck to me. He said he did not want any money and that he would take me to his house and make me stay there. The next evening the boat reached its destination. Every one got down. From there the Gokarnam temple is 3 miles (5 km) away. That Brahmin priest took me with him to his house. He invited me to stay there. I deposited the miscellaneous things that were with me, in a room there. It was 9 p.m. then. Nevertheless, I made a general survey of the temple, had my bath and returned to the house. I was extremely hungry and what he served me was cold rice. I went through the motions of eating some of it. I lay down on the verandah and slept well.

181. The next morning I got up early and went out for my morning ablutions. I had left my things in the house itself. That was Full Moon day. The lunar eclipse would begin around 5 p.m. The temple would close around 10 a.m. after the morning pujas. I kept on walking along the beach and reached a lonely, beautiful place. All facilities were available there, with fresh water for bathing and drinking. There was a small temple there, dedicated to Sitarama. Attached to the temple was a small kitchen. This is a fairly elevated place. The sea

lies below, hugging that place. The view from there was simply enchanting. Finishing my bath etc, and worshipping Rama in the temple, I sat in the front verandah of the temple and did japa and meditation. I went to the Brahmin's house around 10 a.m and had bhiksha. I then made a survey of the surrounding areas.

182. This place is reputed to be the site at which Ravana did severe penance. Even now a small pond is to be seen there where Ravana is said to have answered the first call of nature, the water in it being unfit even to be touched. The deity installed in the temple is Siva. Several thousands of people come from various places to this temple for darshan. Everyone can freely go into the temple and worship. But this freedom is not available to people from Kerala, who are permitted to enter and worship only on payment of a small amount — 8 annas (50 paise) or so. Where do I have any money?

183. I think the eclipse was over by about 6 p.m. Large numbers of people, both men and women take bath in the sea at the time and proceed to the temple with devotion for worship. I am also one of them. The Brahmin priest insisted that he would give me the money for entering the temple. I had no intention of borrowing money. I circumambulated the temple outside singing hymns, and sat in a corner peacefully. I chanted the Mantra imparted to me by the Gurudev and felt deeply satisfied. At night I went to the Brahmin's house, took food and slept there. He should have understood by now that I have absolutely no money at all despite

that he allowed me to remain in a corner of the house. But I had not come here just to stay in a house.

184. The next day itself I moved to the Ram Tirtha, the Rama temple, a deserted place. Several mendicants keep on coming to Gokarnam. Among them, there are several from Kerala also. I did not try to get acquainted with any of them. I began living by going from house to house and accepting Madhurika bhiksha. (The Madhurika or Madhukari system of bhiksha enjoins Sanyasis to go at random to 4 or 5 houses, call the name of the Lord in a low voice to make the lady of the house aware that a mendicant has come, and accept whatever is offered. The food so accepted from these 4 or 5 houses should be consumed at the next meal and nothing should be hoarded. If no bhiksha is offered at any of the houses, the Sanyasi should skip that meal, and sip water, chanting the Lord's name. The same houses should not be visited regularly nor should any prior arrangement be made. The name derives from the practice of honey-bees visiting a few flowers at random and collecting the droplets of honey each flower has to offer - Tr). But from the Rama temple, to go to 2 or 3 houses and return it would take 2-3 hours. Sometimes I would remain for 2-3 days without food.

185. All the materials needed for the puja must be collected well before time — "*Sareeramaadyam Khalu dharma saadhanam*". If the body is not properly maintained, it will get progressively weakened and perish; the mind will not, on its own, be able to carry on its meditation. Madhurika bhiksha is the best; but

I found it totally beyond me and also unbearable to go 2½ - 3 miles away for bhiksha. As I have already mentioned, my leg has been incapacitated. So I obtained some money by writing to friends and, with that, I started doing my own cooking. A mendicant who was an acquaintance also teamed up with me. He used to fetch provisions etc from the market.

186. I spent some days like this in the Rama Ashram. I used to keep on sending letters to Shri Swamiji. I was told that there was an Uma Maheswara temple about 3 miles (5 km) away. I went to that place one day. It was an exceedingly beautiful place. On top of a small hill, there was a little temple. One person could just about manage to be there. An ideal place for penance. The sea is lapping its waves down below. Pure, fresh water can be had at the foot of the hillock. There is a small coconut grove and a small dharmashala down below there. A desire arose in me to stay there the moment I saw all these. I returned to the Rama Ashram. I explained matters to my friend. I gave him some money. I decided to live only on green gram (moong dal). After procuring some quantities of green gram, I reached that divine place and started living inside that temple.

187. The Lord makes me do all sorts of things. I proceed to the foot of the hill, armed with a water pan and go about my morning ablutions. After first taking bath in the sea, I have a bath in a fresh water spring. Not a drop of water can be had on the hill top. So I make it a point to carry some water with me in a vessel when

I go up. Sometimes I had to collect and carry some firewood also. This was a barren hill with some grass only and without trees.

188. Despite difficulties of this nature, the mind was in perfect joy. I was immersed in japa and meditation. I would cook the green gram and take it once a day. Sometimes I would take something at night too. Some mendicants who knew me also used to visit me sometimes. I would give them a share of the green gram and eat what was left. But it was sheer happiness. Sometimes Brahmins would come, do Rudraabhisheka and puja and conduct a big feast. They used to invite me also on these occasions.

189. One day, about 4 p.m. in the evening, I was sitting in meditation, enjoying great peace of mind and joy. Suddenly the body experienced a spell of chill. Even that felt pleasant. From the heart some pieces of poetry were emanating on their own. After sometime everything became peaceful and normal. I did not attach much importance to this. The next day too, at exactly the same time, the same thing happened. The chill increased in intensity. Appetite got reduced. Then I realised that it was an attack of malaria. My friend mendicant took me from Uma Maheswaram to the old Rama Tirtha (Ashram). As directed by him, I took some medicines. Nevertheless I was in the grip of temperature and chill. Gokarnam appeared to be unpleasant. So I decided to return to Quilandy.

190. I went to Gokarna temple, entered the temple

precincts, worshipped Siva and did some offerings and poor feeding. Then I left by steam-boat for Mangalore. I had written about all this to Swamiji. Alighting at Mangalore, I reached Quilandy Ashram one night. At that time, Saranam Brahmachari and one Aasaan were there. They were pleased to see me.

191. I stayed in the Quilandy Ashram for a few days. Fever was coming regularly but I was not completely bed-ridden. I used to get temperature on alternate days. After the temperature abated, I could do my normal work. Then I went to Guruvayoor and did Bhajanam worship there for some days. From there I went to the Tiruvalla Ashram. Some Brahmacharis were staying there.

192. Then I received news that Shri Swamiji had come to Thiruvananthapuram. I went to Thiruvananthapuram to see him. Construction work of the Ashram had not been completed. Swamiji was trying very hard to get it completed as early as possible. Swamiji himself goes along with others to various places for collection of funds. I have darshan of Shri Swamiji. Swamiji is annoyed with me a great deal for having left for Gokarnam without his prior permission. I am emaciated and I have gone to Gokarnam and contracted malaria. Now the next trip should be to Mookambika. Swamiji scolded me on these lines. That night I had very high temperature the like of which I had never before experienced. The Brahmacharis there fetched Dr. Tampi to examine me. He made my body perspire profusely. He must have given me aspirin pills. With that the

temperature subsided. The next day I went to the General Hospital and remained under his treatment. I recovered fully in about 4-5 days. He gave me an injection. I left the Ashram and stayed with a friend for about a week. Swamiji left for Thiruvananthapuram.

193. From Thiruvananthapuram I reached Tiruvalla Ashram. And from there I again reached Guruvayoor. After doing Bhajanam worship there for 2-3 months, I went to the Quilandy Ashram. My interest in Ashram life dwindled. Then I decided to go to Mookambika. I wrote to Swamiji. "I have made Bhakta free" was Swamiji's gracious reply.

194. At any cost I thought I would start for Mookambika. Right then I got a companion (fellow-traveller) too. It was not that I was totally short of money. After resting at intermediate places, I reached Mookambika one evening. Immediately on arrival, I went and had my bath in the river which flows close by, proceeded to the temple, got darshan of the Goddess, and felt deeply satisfied. The Goddess has assumed there a pose to bless everyone — and people from Kerala in particular. Not a few totally illiterate persons from Kerala have performed Bhajanam worship there and become great scholars by Her grace — this is a well-known fact. My stay and worship there were not with any specific object. That same detachment and pure devotion should continue in my heart all the time.

195. Even before I could enjoy the bliss of the Goddess's darshan for even a single minute, someone comes to

me and tells me to leave immediately; the reason is that, here too, people from Kerala had to pay one rupee for darshan. I came out immediately. I lay down on the platform of the temple tower along with my friends and slept comfortably.

196. The next day, after finishing my bath etc., in the morning, I proceeded to the temple, paid the prescribed one rupee, went inside and worshipped to my heart's content. As there are several Brahmin houses adjacent to the temple, it is possible to spend several days on Madhurika bhiksha. Besides, for four annas (twenty-five paise), one can get several sweet cakes and doughnuts (appams and vadas) as prasad from the temple every night. About a mile (1½ km) from the temple, there is a small Ganesha temple. It is in the middle of a small forest. I shifted to that place for stay. I had adopted as priest a Brahmin from the Shankaracharya Math. Sometimes I used to take food at his place. There was a Pappaya tree there, full of Pappaya fruits. It seems, in those days, Brahmins in those parts were not used to eating Pappaya fruits. Daily I used to take 2 or 3 green(unripe) Pappaya fruits to the Ganesha temple, cook them well and eat them. Near the temple and close to the river, I discovered a small cave called Garuda Guha. I moved into that cave. There were several highly poisonous snakes there, but they never troubled me. I continued to go to the Mookambika temple daily. Almost all the people who do Bhajanam worship there are from Kerala.

197. I too stayed there for 4-5 months, doing Bhajanam

worship. The birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda is approaching. When I was in the Ashram, that day used to be observed with religious fervour by offering pujas, conducting feasts etc. I used to send a small sum of money to Bangalore also. But now I have no money. Still, I sent them just the 4 annas(25 paise) I had. When I had sent the money, the desire to see Swamiji welled up and intensified in me. Immediately I set out for Bangalore. There is a place called Sagar which is in the rural area. There are schools and courts there. I rested for a day or two in the outer front verandah of a Brahmin house. If one goes by bus for some distance from there, then one can catch a train to Bangalore. It seemed impossible to walk all that distance. I had no money. I explained my predicament to a stranger, a lawyer. He gave me all the money necessary to take me to Bangalore. Why delay any longer? I caught the bus for the railway station. And later, caught the train to Bangalore. The Ashram is a bit far away from the station. Walking slowly, I reached the Ashram around 10 O'clock in the morning, and fell at Swamiji's feet. At any rate now the Swamiji did not begin to scold. After the preliminary pleasantries, Swamiji told me: "You go and have a quick hair-cut". And Swamiji himself gave me the hair-cutting machine. I went to the room of Brahmachari Veeresan. He was also very happy to see me. I started cutting my hair; but when Veeresan noted that the task was beyond me, he took over and gave me an excellent hair-cut. After bath and food I rested.

198. I began to do each and every job in the Ashram. That was a season when there was rush of work in the

Ashram. The birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda was fast approaching. Swamiji was also very happy. Swamiji Sukhananda too was in the Ashram. He used to perform the poojas. Swamiji told me "You went here and there for penance. President Maharaj stayed here for quite some days. And he gave Sanyasa deeksha to Sukhananda".

199. For Sanyasa, — the mere external dress part of it — I had no desire. Let the whole mind become absolutely pure — that was my goal. The birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda also passed off very peacefully. Swamiji contrived to receive invitations from Kerala and he was planning to go there. Swamiji instructed me to stay on in the Ashram. Accordingly I stayed on there, attending to various items of work. The Ashram had 3 or 4 cows. I used to look after them well. I used to take them for grazing to places where good grass and water were available, and bathe them. All this kept me busy till 11 A.M. I would then return to the Ashram and take food. There were a large number of books in the Ashram. I used to read books of interest to me. Around 5 P.M. I used to water the plants in the garden. All this work I used to do on my own, gladly.

200. Swamiji conveyed the information of his reaching Kerala in a letter addressed to me. In Swamiji's absence the Chief for the time being in charge of the Bangalore Ashram was Brahmachari Veeresan. I showed the letter to him. I did not attempt to send a reply to Swamiji. What I did was to make Brahmachari Veeresan send a reply to Swamiji, giving all the information.

201. "*Dinamapi Rajanee Saayam Praatah*" (Day and night; evening and morning; each follows the other in quick succession and so the days roll on - Tr). It was a peaceful life. Some days later, a telegram is received from Swamiji: "Sri President Maharaj has abandoned his body". Everyone in the Ashram felt distressed. Special pujas and feasts were organised to mark the Samadhi. About a month after that, Swamiji returned from Kerala. Everyone was happy.

202. The Swamiji condescended to tell me: "Well, then. You return to Quilandy", and made me start for that place. Even now Saranam Brahmachari, "Sekharananda" is in charge there. At one stage it became necessary for him to leave for Tiruvalla. Different persons used to be sent there to stay with me in Quilandy. The affairs of the Ashram were going on smoothly. Shri Kundu Panikkar was the then Munsiff at Quilandy. Through him, reading of the Bhagavata regularly became established. I myself used to conduct Bhagavata reading, with explanation of meanings, once a week at his residence, and later at the residence of other devotees.

203. The Kurups of Kuttamathu were famous Zamindars (Janmis). They invited Swamiji to their residence once. It was with great pomp and splendour that they took him in procession from the river jetty to their residence. There were even fire-works displays. I need not specially mention that I was with Swamiji. After staying there comfortably for a day or two, Swamiji left for Bangalore, and myself for Quilandy.

204. I think I stayed at Quilandy this time for about 2 years. Swamiji had told me that he would himself take me to Belur Math, but that has not materialised till now. I applied to Swamiji for permission to visit the place where Shri Ramakrishna practised penance, Dakshineswar, Belur Math and other places. Swamiji sent me a reply granting permission.

205. It was a Brahmachari by name Raman Pillai who was with me then in the Ashram. I entrusted him with the entire responsibility of running the Ashram. After staying for a few days in Guruvayur, I reached Kozhikode (Calicut). Paalaat Parukkutty Amma was a great devotee of the Swamiji's. She used to send money to the Ashram every month. I met her. That noble lady put me in the train for Madras. I reached the Ashram at Madras. Shri Sivananda Swamiji was then the President of that Ashram. He had opened a Mother's Home also there. In accordance with the President Swamiji's wishes, Parukkutty Amma had also sent along with me a lady to work in that Home. I gave all the details to Sivananda Swamiji. I happened to stay there for about a week. Parukkutty Amma's eldest son, Balakrishna Menon (Sri Tapasyananda Swamiji) was then studying in Madras. As per Parukkutty Amma's letter, he too gave me some money towards travel expenses.

206. My intention was to return to Bangalore for Swamiji's darshan and then proceed to Calcutta. When I apprised Swami Sivanandaji of this in the proper way, he advised: "If you wish to go to Belur Math, you

go direct from here. If you go to Bangalore, you may have to stay there itself and then you may as well forget going to Belur Math". There was also another young gentleman who was getting ready to go to Belur Math. Thinking this was the best opportunity, I decided to go to Calcutta directly from Madras.

CHAPTER - 9

207. Srimad Sivananda Swamiji (Swami Sivananda Maharaj, the then President of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, was popularly known as Mahapurusha Maharaj. - Tr.) was the then President (at Belur Math - Tr.). Sivananda Swamiji of Madras gave me a letter addressed to that great and noble Mahapurusha Maharaj. It was Shri Iswarananda Swamiji who had been staying at the Madras Ashram ever since his Sanyasa, that put me in the train to Calcutta.

208. A desire that I have been cherishing for quite some time is about to be fulfilled. I reached the most sacred and tranquil Belur Math comfortably. I got darshan of the great President Maharaj. I submitted to him the letter. He went through it and understood all the details. And he ordered me to stay there itself. The noble President Maharaj was the very embodiment of compassion.

209. I sent a letter to Swamiji at Bangalore. Swamiji's reply was as follows: "You did well to go to Belur Math direct. The great President Maharaj is a compassionate person. As you have already received Mantra deeksha from President Maharaj, no special letter from me is necessary".

210. The Durga Puja Festival approached. This is a Dharmic festival which is celebrated on a grand scale not only in Kerala and Mysore, but all over India in

various forms and in different names. But nowhere other than in Bengal is this Festival conducted with so much of devotion, pomp, splendour and expenditure. In Bengal it is a festival in each and every household. Just like the people of Kerala who must even borrow money to celebrate the Onam Festival, elaborately and artistically, so also in Bengal, loans are freely taken and given to make the Puja a grand success and a feast for the eyes. This is a devotion (bhakti) - oriented festival. There is a group of people here who are experts in moulding exquisite idols of the Goddess from clay. About 15 days before the commencement of the festival season, they would start making the idols. By Sukla Panchami they would complete the work and get the idols ready for Puja. The idols are installed at the places selected for Puja under the Agama Rites. All the Pujas prescribed in the Tantric system are scrupulously performed. On seeing such an idol tastefully and devotionally decorated with new clothes, sandal paste, kumkum (saffron), garlands of flowers etc, one would immediately think that the Goddess Herself has descended to the Earth. The Durgashtami day is considered important. The Pujas and feasts on that day are on a very grand scale. An air of festivity pervades the whole region. The people are elated with sheer joy. The President Mahapurusha Maharaj told me several times: "Look, Durga Puja. Nowhere else other than in Bengal is the puja celebrated on so grand a scale. You are lucky to have come here at this time". On Dasami day the pujas are concluded and the idols are taken ceremoniously and immersed in the Ganga. After that, people embrace one another with affection and joy and

go their way. They then go and have a good feast and rest. Suffice it to say that the people experience the presence of the Goddess Herself.

211. I too spent my days in sheer joy. I used to have darshan of the great President Maharaj twice daily. If possible, and without inconveniencing others, I used to sit down in his room itself and meditate for some time every day. Maharaj was also an adept in cutting jokes. One day, in the presence of the others, he says: "Kambalavantam seetho na baadhate". It was a little cold then. The question and answer are both contained in the statement itself:

Question: Kam balavantam seetho na baadhate? (which strong person is not affected by the cold?)

Answer : Kambalavantam (i.e the one with a blanket) seetho na baadhate. (The one who has a blanket is not affected by the cold).

(As will be realised, the humour lies in splitting the word "Kambalavantam" - Tr.) The Maharaj was also an embodiment of compassion. Once I developed fever. He used to make special enquiries about my condition and ensured that I was treated properly and cured.

212. The Maharaj was staying on the first floor. One day I was sitting on a bench on the ground floor verandah. Maharaj happened to come there all of a sudden. I prostrated before him. He asked me what I wanted. My immediate reply was that I wanted a Kashaya vastra (Saffron robe). Maharaj quickly asked: "Do you wish to have this Kashaya vastra of mine?"

I replied; "This humble soul is awaiting Sanyasa". One can be free with the Maharaj as though to one's parents or, I should say, even to a greater degree.

213. That day would have been a Trayodasi (13th day of the fortnight). Taking me with him, Maharaj consults a Panchanga (Almanac) for an auspicious day and tells me: "You get ready. You will get Sanyasa on the Full Moon day (*)".

214. Is not the Maharaj a limitless ocean of compassion? He instructed Akhanda Maharaj and others to get ready the things needed for the Sanyasa (initiation ceremony). I gave them the money required for the Kashaya clothes. On the day preceding the date set for conferment of Sanyasa, I had the necessary hair-cut and shave and also performed sraaddha. I did not even touch water that day. By 3 A.M. the next morning, I finished my bath in the Ganga river and sat on the verandah doing japa and meditation. Maharaj, after purifying his body, sat in the place fixed for the Viraja Homa. I went there, reverentially prostrated before the Maharaj and sat down on the seat allotted for me. The officiating priest was Swami Omkarananda. The homa was performed. The Sanyasa mantra was imparted to me. I removed all my clothes and abandoned my yajnopaveetha (sacred

(*) The day on which our Guru Maharaj was given Sanyasa Deeksha by the Mahapurusha Maharaj (Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, the then president of the Shri Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math) was Purnima day — the Full Moon day in the month of Krittika — in October 1923 - Tr.

thread). Maharaj himself cut off my tuft with a pair of scissors. He gave me new clothes as also the cloth for Bhiksha. Maharaj gave me a "danda" and called me *Purushottamananda*. I prostrated before Maharaj as well as before all the others there, went to the Ganga river and took my bath. I abandoned my danda in the Ganga river. I wore the new clothes. I had become a Sanyasi. I prostrate before the Maharaj again and go to my place of stay in the Premananda Hall. On the way, my dear friend, Shri Gopalanandji Maharaj comes along with some fruits which he slices and gives me. Maharaj called Brahmachari Chinnu and through him sends me piping hot coffee. That day I accepted a fistful of Bhiksha from the Sanyasis in the Ashram and consumed it. I stayed there like this for 2-3 days.

215. In Belur Math, a scholar used to teach the Sastras to the Sanyasis and the Brahmacharis. According to the degree to which the recipient deserved (i.e. according to his "adhikara"), he used to teach the upanishads and the Brahmasutras also daily. I too used to receive from him direct instruction on the Brahma Sutras with Sankara Bhashya. I had grasped, to a certain extent, the Sutras upto "Tat tu Samanvayaat". Now I have attained Sanyasa too. I wrote to Swamiji immediately. I used to go frequently to Dakshineswar which was the place of penance of Shri Ramakrishna. Now I developed a desire to go to North India to see Hardwar and other places. I submitted this intention to the great President Maharaj who readily granted permission. Seeing my emaciated condition, he ordered; "You must go to Hardwar, and from there, proceed immediately to

Madras." I decided to start the very next day. The then Mahant in the Advaita Ashrama in Kashi (Varanasi) was Chandra Maharaj. Giving me a letter to the Mahant, President Maharaj bade me an affectionate farewell. *En route* I alighted at Gaya, had bath etc. in the Ganga river and stayed there overnight. The next day I reached Kashi station. From there, I reached the Ashram around 9 a.m. in the morning.

216. Chandra Maharaj was afflicted with crippling paralysis. It was extremely difficult for him even to move slightly from one position to another. He had to sit in a chair always. It was from that position that he used to direct the activities of the Ashram with unusual strength, efficiency and despatch. Every single activity was conducted with perfect precision like clock-work. His was a majestic personality and he was a profound devotee of President Maharaj.

217. I submitted President Maharaj's letter to Chandra Maharaj. He said: "Well, you stay here for a few days"; and fixed the place for my stay. And, with my bundles and packages, I started staying there. At that time, 8-10 Swamijis were staying regularly in Advaita Ashram. Although all of them took to me, yet Jagadananda Swamiji had a special regard and affection for me. He was a great scholar. He used to teach vedanta to keen Sanyasis. On some occasions, I too used to listen.

218. I finished my bath and food and rested. That evening itself, one Swamiji took me for darshan of Lord Viswanatha.

*"Gangaa taranga ramaneyajataa kalaapam
Gauree nirantara vibhooshitavaamabhaagam
Naaraayanapriyamanangamadaapahaaram
Vaaraanaseepurapatim Bhaja Viswanaatham."*

Even now this verse springs into my memory. That temple is crowded at the time of Deepaaraadhana (Aarati). 8 or 10 devoted Pandits, with their faces smeared with sacred ashes after bath, perform Abhisheka of the Lord. The deepaaraadhana (Aarati) to the chanting of Mantras, is something special to Kashi. The jostling and pushing of the large crowd which turns up at the time of Deepaaraadhana, is ever so intense and severe. I too witness such a deepaaraadhana and felt gratified. Then followed darshan of Annapurna.

*"Annapoorne Sadaapoorne Sankarapraanavallabhe
Jnaanavairaagyasiddhyartham bhikshaam dehi
Maheswari".*

After the darshan, circum-ambulation. Thereafter, I too sat down quietly in a corner and did japa and meditation. I returned to the Ashram, had food and rested.

219. In those days every day I would go to the Ganga river to take my bath and have darshan of Lord Viswnatha. A dip in the Ganga always turns one away from bad company, blossoms the mind and creates a supreme awareness in the mind:

*"Namostu te bhagavati Gange dussanganaasini
Tanotubhaktim vimalaam nisreyasasukhaavahaam".*

There are several ghats there — Dasaasvamedha Ghat; Manikarnika Ghat; Harishchandra Ghat etc. The Ganga river offers a special sight in the evening — waves continually lap the banks; boats ply constantly carrying passengers hither and thither. Everyone chants and sings in an exuberant mood. At one place Harikatha is being done; at another a bhajan is in progress; and at a third place, chanting of Bhagavata is being done. Adjoining the water, planks have been erected on which devotees — men and women — sit down and do meditation without being in the least distracted by all the rumpus going on around them. I too go and sit down somewhere there and derive bliss by chanting several times the newly acquired Sanyasa mantras. On several days it was to be well beyond 9 P.M. when I returned to the Ashram. Undoubtedly Kashi is not only a holy place for liberation, but also one for devotion.

220. Now it is time for Kaali Puja. As is well-known, this Puja is also of special interest to Bengalis. It is celebrated with particular gusto in the Ashram. Several kinds of delicacies are offered to Goddess Kaali. The entire night is spent in Pujas, bhajans and music. I too participated in all these with dedication. By 4 A.M., at dawn, the pujas come to an end. It is only then that food is consumed. At that untimely hour, I too participated liberally of all that cold food. At 10 A.M. I went to the Ganga for bath. On Dipavali day, one gets a special darshan of Goddess Annapoorna. People throng

for the darshan of the Mother who is tastefully bedecked with gold and gem-studded ornaments. I too had an excellent darshan and returned to the Ashram. A sort of shooting pain started in my stomach. I was also feeling chill (it was dysentery). Somehow I managed to reach the Ashram. Seeing my sick condition, they sent me to the Seva Ashram for treatment. One could say that a Seva Ashram of this type does not exist anywhere else in India. Although there are several Seva Ashrams such as the one at Kankhal in Hardwar and at other places, run by the Shri Ramakrishna Sangh, yet the extent and speciality of this Seva Ashram at Kashi are something unique. Patients are looked after here with maternal love and care. I too was bed-ridden there as a patient. A Swamiji used to come frequently from Advaita Ashram to ascertain my condition. Despite all this, my illness was only getting worse day by day. It was the month of Vrischikam (November - December). My birth star was approaching. I am ready even to abandon the body. On the bed beside me lies a patient who has knowledge of Sanskrit. After mutual discussion, I kept on awaiting the moment of departure from this world. At that time, the Swamiji brought a famous physician and got me examined by him. He injected some medicines, and there was some abatement of the disease. Gradually I began getting well. Although the Swamiji had been telling me that I should leave the Seva Ashram only after I had fully recovered, it so happened that one day, all of a sudden, I was discharged. On discharge, I returned to the Advaita Ashram. I would take food sometimes in the Ashram and sometimes I would go for Madhurika Bhiksha. The fever and

dysentery started troubling me again. Again Seva Ashram became my refuge. I was permitted to stay there until I was fully recovered.

221. The Kumbha Mela was approaching at Prayag then. At Prayag, Hardwar, Nasik and Ujjain, the Poornakumbh is celebrated once in 12 years and the Ardh Kumbh once every six years. When the Mela was first organised, it should have been a real "get-together" of great souls. "*Tat chintanam, Tat Smaranam, anyonyam cha tat prabodhanam, tat ekaparatvam cha Brahmaabhyaasam vidur janaah*". It was to enjoy such bliss that Sadhus used to participate in the Mela. Is not the meaning of the word "Mela" itself "to meet together, to get together?" But now the festival has degenerated to a very low level. Nevertheless, keen and curious (inquisitive) persons can still hear and learn a lot from these Melas. It is customary for several heads of Maths, Mandaleswaras and others to come ceremonially with their disciples and stay on for a month or two at the Mela site. The Head of a Math, called Bhaagavataananda, invited the Swamiji's in the Advaita Ashram at Kashi. Along with them I too reached Prayag. This was a new experience for me. In Kerala what is done is to worship and honour Brahmins and feast them. On the other hand, here it is puja of Sadhus (poor persons or Sanyasins) and feeding of Sadhus that is considered important. Every day a grand feast is given. It is also convenient to sit quietly in a small room and chant the Lord's names. Practically at all the Melas in Prayag there are incidents of (catching of) fire. One day a fire started near the headquarters of

Swami Bhaagavataananda. The Sadhus joined together and put out the fire. The damage was not much. The mela came to a close. Most of the Sadhus departed. Somebody took me along to stay in the Ashram of Govindagiri Swamiji in Jushi. That is a famous place. Sadhus also stay there permanently. There is a Sanskrit Pathasala belonging to the Ashram. Food is given free to students. I stayed there comfortably. And Maha Sivaratri too came and passed.

222. It was getting hotter and hotter. So I decided to go to Hardwar. I had a desire to visit the birth place of Sri Rama, Ayodhya, also. I had some money with me. I went by train and reached Ayodhya. There I stayed comfortably for 4-5 days. I visited the birth place of Sri Rama and had bath in the Sarayu river and stayed nearby. From there I went to Hardwar. The Shri Ramakrishna Ashram is in Kankhal. I reached the Ashram one evening. Initially the Swamijis objected to my stay there, but when I introduced myself fully, they agreed that I may stay as long as I wanted to. The Mahant in charge of the Ashram there was Sri Kalyananandji Swamiji. Shri Nischalanandji Maharaj was his assistant. It was Swami Vivekananda who had inaugurated this Ashram. This place had also been honoured by the touch of President Maharaj's lotus feet. Attached to the Ashram is a hospital for taking care of patients. This hospital ranks next only to the Seva Ashram in Kashi. After staying there for 6-7 days, I proceeded to Rishikesh by a tonga (a horse-drawn vehicle - Tr). A Brahmachari accompanied me to Rishikesh.

223. Hardwar is also known as Gangadwar — an outlet to attain Hari or Hara; and "Dvar" can also be taken as meaning "door". Several sages have performed severe penance here and attained god-head. In the olden days this was quite a deserted place. * Har-ki-paudi — there is a large platform here. The entire floor is paved with marble stones. The Brahmakund is also here. It was here that, according to the Bhagvata, the Vidura-Maitreya dialogue took place. It was here that Brahma along with the gods, welcomed Ganga. That was how the place received the name Brahmakund. It seems Kankhal was the capital of Daksha Prajapati. Daksha Ghat is the place where Daksha performed his great Yagna. There is a Siva temple here. Sitakund is the place where Sita abandoned her body. Even today Sapt Sarovar is a place fit for tapasya(austerities). Was it not here that Duryodhana's father, Dhritarashtra, gave up his body?. His wife Gandhari ascended the funeral pyre along with her husband. There are temples of Chandi Devi and Manasa Devi on the hill-tops facing the Brahma-kund and the Ganga. There are Ashrams and headquarters of Sadhus, as also dharmashalas. The Kumbha Mela takes place once in 12 years. This great festival is conducted when the sun enters the Kumbh rasi(Aquarius) and Jupiter enters Mesha rasi (Aries). Sadhus and house-holders come for the Mela in lakhs. On the occasion of the final dip in the Ganga,

Haridwar is also called Haradvar — the "paudi" possibly meaning the steps to the place where Hari or Hara stays — that may be the meaning of the words "Har-ki-paudi".

about 50 lakh people congregate. The greatness of Hardwar defies all description. It is indeed the door of Hari and Hara.

224. Along with the Brahmachari I reached Rishikesh. A large number of Sadhus stay here. Some stay in Dharmashalas; others stay in leaf-huts (parna-saalas) built by them. There are two large temples belonging to Kali Kambliwala and the Punjabi Sindhis. The Sadhus are given cooked rice around 10-11 a.m. I got a place to stay and I stayed there. I used to go to the dharmashala, get bhiksha and live like that. There are also some evening dharmashalas. One can get chapaties and dal from there. The place I first got for stay was a dilapidated one. After some days one gentleman took me to the Calcutta dharmashala and fixed up my stay there. From there I moved to the Brahmananda Ashram. This Ashram is run under the control and supervision of Kailasa Ashram. Its chief was Swami Prema Puri. He was a great scholar and totally detached. He had a special affection for me. I must have stayed there for a month or two. That would have been in April 1924 A.D.

225. The Triveni Ghat is both sacred and a place of pilgrimage. Maayakund, Vasudhaara, Seshadhaara, Lakshman Jhoola, Bharat Mandir etc are also sacred places. It is said that if someone were to sit down for meditation on the river bank in Mayakund, he would not feel like getting up. Now one can see large numbers of men and women everywhere. Much of Rishikesh's greatness has been lost; yet really dedicated persons can even now experience its greatness. Rishikam=

Indriya; Risheekaanam eesah= Lord of the Indriyas (sense organs). I am inclined to think that Rishikesh must have got its name because one who meditates there will ere long become master of his senses. Rishikesh is also known as Kubjaamlapuri, it is said. This name is said to have been derived from a crooked(bent) amla tree.

226. I hear Uttar Kashi is a very good place for tapasya. I got an intense desire that, if so, I should go there. I had the necessary clothes and money. I reached Dehra Dun from Rishikesh by train. I stayed there for 2-3 days. Then I deliberated on what I should do now. I should first reach Mussoorie. Those 13 miles (21 km) constitute a very steep ascent. How is it possible for me to climb all these hills, that too, carrying all my belongings? One morning, after bath, I sat down and started chanting the Lord's name with this single thought uppermost in my mind. My mind became clear. I decided to start for Mussoorie at once. And I began climbing the hill, toting all my possessions. When I recall that daring, foolhardy act of mine, I burst out laughing. "*Panghum Langhayate Girim*" — this was actually experienced by me [A lame person conquers the hill - Tr]. Suffice it to say that by 4 p.m. I had reached Mussoorie. I secured a place in the Sanatana Dharmashala. I took some food and slept soundly.

227. The next day I briefly went round Mussorie. The administrators those days were westerners. Mussoorie was a resort they liked most. Every nook and corner, road and street, had been kept scrupulously clean. Not

a speck on the roads, not even a stray piece of paper. About 2 miles (3 km) from where I stayed, there was a small waterfall which provided good, clean water for drinking and bathing. Sometimes I used to go there and enjoy my bath. I happened to meet a Parsi gentleman who was Headmaster in a school in Bombay. He had developed a certain degree of detachment. He is ready to start on the journey to Uttar Kashi. He has also brought along a servant. He has a good opinion about me. The next morning all of us started for Uttar Kashi after prayers to the Lord. At about 4 P.M. in the evening of the fourth day, we reached Kali Kambliwala's Dharmashala and rested.

228. Although there were several obstacles in the way, all of them vanished in the firm resolve to reach Uttar Kashi. I must also specially mention that I had the unstinting help of this eminent Parsi brother. The Lord is the Refuge for all.

CHAPTER - 10

229. After food, all of us spent the night in the Kali Kambliwala's Dharmashala itself. In the morning, after bath and food, I began to go round and see the principal sights of Uttar Kashi. First I had darshan of Lord Viswanath and then of Sakti. Proceeding on and on like that, I had darshan of Laksheswara Mahadev also. This is a very ancient temple, situated on the bank of the Bhagirathi river. There is also a Dharmashala here where 8-10 Sadhus can stay in comfort. The place is very enchanting and there is no disturbance from people. The moment I saw this place, my mind took to it. The Mahant there was an "Udaaseena" Sanyasi, Charandas. There were 4-5 detached Sanyasis also there. The Mahant permitted me to stay there. I returned to Kali Kambliwala's Dharmashala, had food and rested. The next evening I went to Laksheswara and began to stay there.

230. Daily I must go to the Kali Kambliwala's Dharmashala (Satram) for bhiksha — rice, chapatis and dal — and return to Laksheswara — a distance of 1½ miles (2½ km) each way. I then go to the Ganga river bank and eat the bhiksha. There is no dearth of bhiksha and I would keep something for the evening too. Sometimes I would take bhiksha in the evening from the nearby Kailasa Ashram. Days went by like this comfortably. I benefitted quite a good deal from the company of scholarly Swamiji's like Brahma Prakashji. Further Shri Deva Giri Swamiji was staying in an Ashram near the Kailasa Ashram. He was extremely

compassionate and erudite. He knew by heart the entire Sankara Bhashyam of the Bhagavad Gita, word for word. I had not yet acquired even a working knowledge of Hindi. So it was only with Shri Deva Giri Swami who was a scholar in Sanskrit that I could converse freely. I would meet him frequently and spend some time in spiritual conversation with him.

231. As you know, people hardly wear foot-wear in Kerala. The stones here (in Uttar Kashi) are sharp and pointed and it is impossible to walk here without foot-wear. I had also put on footwear for walking all that distance from Mussoorie. I used to wear foot-wear even while going for bhiksha. It became not merely difficult but totally impossible to walk without footwear as the soles of the feet would get cracked and blistered otherwise. Once when I was returning to Laksheswara from bhiksha, I happened to see a youth from Kerala on the way. The moment he saw me, he came to me and saluted me. He accompanied me to the bank of the Ganga in Laksheswara and shared the bhiksha with me. The bhiksha that I used to get was more than adequate for one person. This youth was very keen to stay with me and I was convinced that it was the Lord who had sent him to help me; he was of great help to me. So I kept him with me. He himself used to go and get the bhiksha for me. He was young and strongly built.

232. I think it was in May 1924 that I reached Uttar Kashi. As mentioned, Laksheswara is on the bank of the Ganga. Once you reach that place, you can stay

there without being bothered by the heat. Within a few days my legs became alright. So I myself started going for bhiksha. There is no doubt that, if one can live without depending on others, both the body and the mind will become stronger. The rainy season set in. The Parsi gentleman who had come with me was staying in a small hut near the Kailasa Ashram. Near Laksheswara, there was a small cave at a slight elevation. On some days I go and sit in it. Ashtami Rohini (Janma Ashtami) also passes off. I had a fresh bout of fever. Carrying my possessions, I moved to the place where my Parsi brother was staying and began to stay with him. It began to rain heavily. The Parsi gentleman starts on a pilgrimage to Badri Narayana and other places and I am left all alone in that small hut. The fever developed into bleeding dysentery.

233. God's disportations are strange indeed! I lay on the sick-bed like this for 20 days. The hut is situated by the road side. So, on their way to the dharmashala for bhiksha and back, Sadhus used to enquire about my condition. Shri Deva Giri Swamiji also was living close by. He knew some medicines. He gave me some medicines. He would also prepare rice-gruel (Kanji) himself and come and see me once or twice a day and give it to me. There were lots of bed bugs in the hut. Several times I thought of drowning myself in the Ganga, but I could not walk all that distance to the river which was somewhat far away. My friend, Mr. Kewal Ram, the Head Master, sent some medicines from the hospital. I took them and drank some milk.

Gradually the fever subsided and I became well, but I had become very thin and weak.

234. That year the rains were very heavy. There was loss of life and property because of floods. I heard later that a Sadhu who had been doing Bhajanam worship in the cave in which I had been staying, also perished in the floods. In Rishikesh there was a place called Jhaadi — a fit place for tapasya — between the two branches of the river Ganga. It was a very fine place for doing penance. When I was in Rishikesh, I had been to that enchanting place and had desired to live there. But that was not god's will, because, had I been living there, I too would have perished, along with hundreds of Sadhus, in the floods.

235. Slowly I began walking a little. The then Mahant of Kailasa Ashram was a scholarly, detached Bengali gentleman. He extended his compassion to me and also made arrangements for me to take food there itself twice daily. He used to do Bhagavata Parayanam. And I too used to listen sometimes. And I used to get very delicious food.

236. November came. It started getting cold here even in November. Because of his great compassion and affection for me, my friend Sri Deva Giri Swamiji used to press me insistently : "You must not stay here in this cold. You must get back quickly to Madras. This is a place where it rains dew and cold". I listen to all this quietly, but I have no desire or intention of leaving Uttar Kashi. Even if I were to die, let me die here.

Seeing my firm resolve, the Swamiji himself permitted me to stay here. A little higher up from Deva Giri Swamiji's Ashram, in a place called Ujjheli, there was a vacant building. It belonged to a vaisya, Charan Das, who was the Swamiji's devotee. The building was in Swamiji's possession. It had all the necessary conveniences. There were lots of books on the vedas and on religious subjects. In the cold season, Swamiji used to provide food there to several Sadhus. I had not known these details earlier. Anyway, Swamiji made me stay there. He also gave me complete freedom in regard to that building.

237. Time went by very comfortably and happily. I read several books. It was here that I was fortunate to read Tulsi Ramayan for the first time. I could follow it to some extent although it was in Hindi, as I had some knowledge of Sanskrit. The Prasthaana Trayam of our Scriptures consists of the Gita, the upanishads and the Brahma sutram. I began to understand something of the principles and the truths contained in them. Now I began to develop greater attachment to and interest in the path of Vedanta. And I presented to someone the Bhagvata text that had been with me. There were excellent facilities here for satsang. I used to meet frequently and have darshan of such great souls as Shri Deva Giri Swamiji, Kevala Ashram Swamiji, Siddhashrama Swamiji, Brahma Prakashji, Bhikshu Swamiji, Sankarananda Bharati, Sankarananda Swamiji and others. In addition, a young Sanyasi of the Ramkrishna Mission, Dheerananda Maharaj, was also staying here. He was a degree-holder

and renounced. I had become acquainted with him even at Belur Math. Even here we used to meet occasionally.

238. It began to get colder. As I had the necessary facilities to withstand the cold, I did not have to face the difficulties of a cold winter. It snowed continuously for 3 days. This was the first time I was witnessing snowfalls. A white glare everywhere. The branches of trees crash down. Plantain and other trees perish. It is difficult to walk on the roads without protection for the feet. A biting cold wind is blowing. It is extremely difficult to venture outside in the open for any work. When one enters the room, closes the door and sits down in meditation, all these troubles and problems vanish in the sheer bliss that results. The mind seems extremely happy. When I think of how I decided to stay on here without leaving, I am all praise for the Lord. The winter passes off like this.

239. Gangotri is over 58 miles (93 km) from here. My desire to visit that place intensifies. Everyone prevents me from going on the ground that the roads and tracks have all been blocked because of heavy rains and landslides. The way was impossible to be negotiated even by very strong persons. That being the case, their fear was that I would not be able to make it. Somewhere on the way I would fall down and perish. But is not my strength entirely that of the Lord? One fine morning, after getting the blessings of Deva Giri Swamiji, I set out with Gangotri as my goal. I had the necessary clothes, waterpot and some money.

240. The way was extremely impassable. All that they had said proved to be right. If formerly, one could reach a spot after walking one mile, it is now difficult to reach that same place even after walking 2 miles. Despite all this, I decided not to retrace my steps but proceed forward. By evening I reached a Sadhu's Ashram. After taking food, I rested for the night there itself. The next day, after what seemed to be interminable walking, I reached a place called Gangaani. There I went to the Ashram of Brahmachari Padmanabhan who was known to me. I spent a day or two there happily. He is now seated in the Yoga posture. Milk and ghee are essential for yoga practice. I had some money with me. Keeping just two rupees for myself, I offered all the balance amount for his use. My intention was to travel without any money. The third day I continued my journey and reached a place called Battuwadi by evening. I spent the night there. Suffice it to say that, the next day, after a long spell of walking, I reached Dharaali. There are small huts here for Sadhus to stay. I too stayed in one of them. The village is nearby and the villagers are generous. They offer madhurika bhiksha to Sadhus with pleasure. I also wonder whether there is not a peculiar smell that emanates from the rice they offer! In the early stages I used to eat that rice after closing my nose. Then I became used to it. There it is also possible to obtain Kali Kambliwala's atta (wheat flour). I had not so far attempted to make chapatis with wheat flour. Here I began to do so, but I could not make them well.

241. A Sanyasi by name Krishnaashramam was staying

here, doing tapasya. It is well known that Sri Sankaracharya had fixed 10 Sanyasasrama names for Sanyasis, viz. Giri, Puri, Parvata, Aranya, Vana, Saraswati, Bharati, Tirtha, Sagara, Ashramam.* The Sanyasis belonging to these 10 categories of names are called Dasanaami Sanyasis. Out of these, the "Ashrama" title is specially for "Dandi" Sanyasis. It is accepted and recognised that the Dandi Sanyasis are superior to the others. He too was a Dandi Swami. Dandi Sanyasis who have given up their danda are called Tyaktadandis.*

242. Krishnaashramam too is a Tyaktadandi. He has been doing tapasya here, also living naked, for quite a long time. When I saw him first, in 1925, he should have been over 50 years of age. At present he is staying in Gangotri itself. I had his darshan here in Dharaali. He observes total silence. All the villagers consider him to be God. Every householder will, after preparing food, first take a portion and offer it to Krishnaashramam and then only the members of the household will take their food. I too happened to be there at the time he was taking food. With great affection he called and invited me and made me sit near him. And he gave me portions from all the items that had been offered to him as Bhiksha. After spending 2 or 3 days like this happily, I ventured to proceed to Gangotri. Gangotri is 15 miles (24 kilometres) from here. I reached Gangotri. Here too there is a food-station established by Kali

* *Teerthaashramavanaaranyagiri parvatasaagaraah
Puri Bhaarati Saraswati chadasaite dasanaaminah.*

Kambliwala. There are facilities there for stay also. On the bank of the river are one or two caves. I stayed in a cave also, for a day. The place of origin (real source) of the Ganga river is still further up from here — Gomukham. From Gangotri I returned to Dharaali and stayed at the same place where I had stayed on the forward journey.

243. A young man who was then staying in the Gandhi Ashram happened to come there. He is also on a pilgrimage to Kedar-Badari. When I was in Uttar Kashi he had come to Ujjheli and stayed there for 2-3 days. When he saw me in Dharaali he stayed there with me for a week or so. He was a good cook too. He taught me how to prepare chapatis. He is ready to visit the 4 dhams at Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath, and Badari. For this purpose he had procured from Rishikesh coupons (chits or vouchers) entitling him to "Sadaavrtti" (materials for self-cooking) from the Kali Kambliwala chowtries/dharmashalas. At each of the principal food stations (satrams) on the route, on production of the chit, he would be given free rice, dal, flour etc for 1 or 2 occasions. He had with him a chit for 2 persons. "If you desire to visit Kedar-Badri etc, please accept these chits from me", so saying, he offered the chits to me.

244. To tell the truth; I had no great desire to go anywhere. Even to such places as I went it was the Lord who pushed me along. I now started thinking. It was very difficult to come by these chits even in Rishikesh. The fact that they became so readily available to me indicated the Lord's intention. So I got ready for

the pilgrimage to Kedar-Badri. Although my friend insisted that he would offer me money also if I needed it, I did not accept it.

245. Now it is also the season for pilgrimage to Kedar-Badri. Many who had returned to Dharaali from Gangotri were also getting ready to go to Budha-Kedar. Most of them were women. There were many among them with their backs bent with age. Thinking that, if these old women could go, I too could make it, I began to follow them. They had several articles of food with them for consumption on the way. But I have nothing with me. It is very interesting to see the sight of 5-6 of them proceeding with sticks in their hands for support. Leaving Dharaali, we reached Battuwadi and spent the night there. The next day we started at dawn itself. Budhakedar is 30 miles (48 Km) from here. The first 4-5 miles are a steep ascent. When we reached the top of that hill, there was yet another, and then again another and so on. Climbing hills with them continuously, I felt fagged out. Now I have the chits with me. I reached a place where I could get sadaavrtti. There I got all the necessary ingredients. Evening came. After finishing bath etc, I prepared chapatis and ate them and rested. The Lord is the refuge.....

246. The next morning itself I resumed the journey. Walking, sitting down, lying down and resting, somehow by evening I reached Budha-Kedar. It is plain ground here. The deity installed here is Lord Siva. The river flows nearby. There is also a dharmashala. This is a place which affords all facilities to pilgrims and to

passers-by to stay. The people here are somewhat educated. They are also relatively more clean. I stayed here only for one night. Starting the next afternoon at 3 P.M., by sun-set I reached another dharmashala where too sadaavrtti was available. By the time I reached there, I had become extremely weak and tired. My leg was aching severely and I could not walk one step further. Somehow I went and procured some flour and other things. With great difficulty I began to cook. When the food was half-cooked, I ate it and, praying to God, lay down and slept. I was considerably upset, thinking what I should do here. I got up in the morning and, walking slowly, reached Triyuganarayana. There is a temple here. There the fire never goes out in the Havan Kund. Pilgrims and passers-by buy firewood and offer it in the Havankund. It appears that the marriage of Siva and Parvati took place here. It is said that this Havan Kund is the one lit up at the time of that marriage. Besides, there are 4 pure-water Kunds — Vishnu Kund, Brahma Kund, Rudra Kund and Saraswati Kund. By all standards, this is an enchanting place.

247. From there I left for Kedar. On the way I stopped at Gowri Kund. The water was so hot that it was difficult even to dip one's finger in it. Yet several people take their bath here. I proceeded further slowly and, reaching Rambaada, rested there. It seems that Kedarnath Puri is 3 miles (5 km) from here. One has to climb to reach there. The sight is captivating and pleases the mind. After crossing Mandakini river, if one reaches Kedar Puri, one feels happy indeed. From atop

the mountain, the view all round is very picturesque and panoramic. It is very cold here and firewood is very difficult to come by. Pilgrims return immediately after darshan of Kedarnathji. I spent 3 whole days there. "Namah Sivaaya saantaaya Kaaranatraya hetave", "Rajatagiri nibham chaaruchandraavatamsam", "Ratnaih Kalpojvalaangam", "Parasumrgadharam Krittivaasam", "Visvaadyam, visvavandyam Nikhilabhayaharam panchavaktram, trinetram", — chanting these names of the Lord and meditating on Him, I climbed down to Gowri Kund and rested there. The next day I reached Naali chatti; from there I reached Ookimath. This is also a famous place. During winter the Kedarnath temple is closed. During that period, pujas for Kedar Nathiji are performed at Ookimath. A very fine temple there. It was here that Ushadevi acquired knowledge from Parvati. And she was blessed that she should get darshan in a dream of Aniruddha. I stayed there for a night. The next day I reached another chatti (market place). It began to rain heavily. Seeing a "Sreshthi" resting place, I tried to rest there. A chatti is a shop (or group of shops) where one can buy things, with facilities for travellers to sit and lie down. But if one has no money, the owners of the chatti will not allow you even to go anywhere near them. I had spent all the money I had, with not a paisa in hand. The owner of the chatti will only permit those who buy things from him even to sit down there. Come what may, violating his instructions, I sat down in a corner.

248. It is 2 O'clock in the afternoon. I feel very hungry,

what is to be done? A rich Seth(sreshthi) from Calcutta had come to the chatti along with his entourage. I solicited bhiksha from that Seth. He gave me a small measure of wheat flour. When I told him that it was raining very heavily and that I had no firewood, he gave me just one anna(6 paise). Taking that I came and sat down, thinking about what to do in the circumstances. I saw an old woman completely drenched in the rain and shivering in the cold, approaching the Seth and begging in a very feeble voice . The Seth talked to her in very harsh tones: "Only just now I gave bhiksha to the man. Now you too want it, is it?" On hearing this, the old woman became extremely distressed and started moving away. I was sitting watching and listening to all this. I hailed the old woman in low tones: "O mother! please come here." She came near me. I gave her the wheat flour and the one anna. She went away in great happiness and I too was relieved. All these Seths are after all willing to spend lakhs of rupees for wrong and undeserving purposes — for name and fame; but when it comes to a shivering, drenched, hungry old lady, they are unwilling to spend even one paisa. May God Himself bless such people.

*"Mrudulam kimuvastu he sakhe navaneetaadapi
sajjanasya hrd
Tadidam dravate svataapanaat parataapaat
dravate sataam manah"*

[Meaning: as given by Guru maharaj himself: The question is — Is there anything softer than freshly made butter? The answer is yes. That is, noble men's

heart. The reason? Butter melts only when the butter itself gets hot. But even when other people's hearts get hot (with distress and grief), the hearts of noble men melt. Noble men's heart melts and melts when they see others' misery — that is the gist.] I continued to sit there. Yes, the "chit" I got that night was for hunger and fasting! That Seth's servants did not fail to give some little bit of food. "Oh Lord, without adequate food, how am I to climb up and get down all these hills in the morrow?" With these thoughts I hugged the lap of the Goddess of sleep and slept well.

249. The next halt was Gopeshwar. I had a comfortable meal there. The next halt was at Chamotsanga. By the time I reached there after crossing the Alaknanda across a bridge, it was dark. This is an important place. There are offices, schools, dispensaries, hospitals and market places here. There are Kali Kambliwala's dharmashalas too. Sadaavrtti is also available. Although I collected wheat flour and other materials, I merely bundled them up and did not try to cook any food. I tried to sleep but could not because of bed-bugs everywhere. This is the one misery I cannot stand in travel. I went near the bridge and lay down on the road side. I got up very early in the morning and resumed my journey. After I had walked about 6-7 miles, (10-11 km), I reached a "chatti". I had just one pie (half a paisa) with me. I procured vessels from the owner of the chatti. Vessels are issued only to those who procure provisions or other things from the chatti. The owner must have given me the vessels thinking I would be buying provisions and things from him later. I procured "one pie" (half a paisa)

worth of fire wood from him. Making a fire, I placed the dal on it. When I began to mix the wheat flour, the owner of the chatti came running there. He abused me, saying "where did you get this wheat flour? You cheated us, didn't you?". He insisted that I return the vessels at once. I simply stood there, not knowing what to do or to say. He did not have the heart to throw away the dal that was cooking on the fire. Unaccountably he showed some kindness suddenly, "All right, please return the vessels soon", so saying, he went away. I finished making the chapatis and dal and ate the food. Then I cleaned the vessels well and returned them to the shop.

250. The next halt was Garuda Ganga where I reached one evening. I went to the Dharmashala and deposited my things in a corner. Then I went to the Garuda Ganga river and took my bath. The water was crystal clear. All my travel fatigue vanished. The mind experienced great happiness. Travellers are in the habit of taking away with them small pebbles collected from the river-bed. It seems snakes and serpents will not come wherever these pebbles are kept. The legend is that it is here that the Lord manifested himself and appeared before Sri Garuda Swami. There is also a small temple of Garuda Swami here. I worshipped there and returned to the Dharmashala. One can get sadaavrtti here. I procured the articles, made chapatis etc and ate. There was some wheat flour and other things left over. Sadaavrtti is issued only to chit-holders. But people without chits also travel in this area. The Dharmashala building is two-storeyed. I had occupied a portion on the ground floor. When I began to call out

whether the wheat flour etc would be of use to any poor person, a gentleman suddenly approaches me. He was none other than that noble person who had tended me at Dharaali and had given me the chits. He was returning after completing his pilgrimage to Badri Narayana. The moment he heard my voice, he had recognised me, and he had rushed towards me, all eagerness to meet me. Just as he was, I too was very pleased to see him again. He expressed great concern at the fact that I had become very thin and weak. He also knew that I had no money with me. He said: "Did I not tell you even before that you should keep some money with you? Well, it does not matter. Please accept the money now. Along with the money, I have a request too. I know Swamiji's temperament well. The money is exclusively for Swamiji's use. It should not be given to others". I told him that, in that case, I did not want the money, and refused to accept it. But laughingly he thrust a five-rupee note into my hand. It is well-nigh impossible to estimate the value of that five-rupee note. I then went away to my corner in the ground floor, and he went away to his place. Thinking of the strange ways of the Lord, I fell into sleep.

251. Leaving at dawn the next day, I reached Paataal Ganga. After finishing my morning ablutions and bath, I bought sweet-meats for 4-5 annas (25-30 paise), distributed the bulk of it to others, and ate a small portion myself. There are heavy landslides here every year. Sometimes a large number of travellers perish. After travelling this difficult terrain by the evening I reached Gulab chatti. This is a comfortable place where

I took my food at night and rested. The next day I reached Kunwar chatti. From there, one evening I reached Joshi Math. During the six snow-bound winter months for which Badri Narayana is closed, pujas to Badri Narayana are performed here, in Joshi Math. As in Badri, the priest here too is a Namboodiri Brahmin from Kerala. I rested here for a day or two. The priests at Badri temple are known as "Rawals". About 5-6 miles (8-10 km) away are Bhavishya Badri and Bhavishya Kedar. In due course, when the intensity of Kali Yuga begins to be felt seriously, the two mountains near Vishnu Prayag will collapse and become one solid mass of debris. When, at that time, it becomes impossible to proceed to Badri, people must content themselves with worship at Bhavishya Badri and Bhavishya Kedar. It is said that this is where Pandu received his curse. When a Sage and his wife were engaged in amorous sports, in the guise of animals, Pandu happened to wound and kill the male animal (the Sage). It is said that it was due to the curse of this Sage's wife that Pandu became unable to enjoy his wife Kunti. From Joshi Math I reached Vishnu Prayag. To reach the Ganga, one has to climb down about 150 feet (about 45 metres). The place is beautiful. I then reach Pandukeshwar. There is a small temple here. It is said that the idol in that temple was brought by Arjuna from heaven. There is also a village here. From here I reach Hanuman Chatti which is said to be the last "chatti". There are a Hanuman temple, a Dharmashala, and shops here. I rested here. The next dawn I started for Badri Nath. One can reach Badri by walking for 5 miles (8 km). On the way, after crossing Kaanchana

Ganga and climbing ascents, I became very tired. When one climbs a mountain, one can see the Badri temple a mile (1½ km) away. After resting a while at this point, I reached Badri Nath in great happiness. After proceeding to the front side of the temple and prostrating there, I went to the Dharmashala and deposited my things there. Quickly I finished my bath. Here, in Tapta Kund, the water is always warm. After all this tedious journey, when one takes bath in the Kund, all the weariness and fatigue disappears and the mind becomes relaxed and joyous. After changing clothes, I go inside the temple, worship the Lord and become fortified. The mind is soaked in bliss. Is this not the spot to which Krishna sent Uddhava? One recalls all the episodes in the Bhagavata. It is impossible to think, even in a dream, that I who had been stricken with paralysis and was unable even to get up from my sick-bed, would ever reach Badrinath. I was rooted to that place for quite some time, enjoying the bliss of the Lord's darshan and remembering His boundless compassion. People from all parts of India flock to Badri for the Lord's darshan like the incessant flow of a river. So it is impossible for anyone to remain there for long. After darshan, I came out and circumambulated the temple. I worshipped the Lord again at the noon deepaaraadhana(aarati) time. The deepaaraadhana confers indescribable bliss.

252. I went to Kali Kambliwala's dharmashala, took food and rested. I started to visit the important places in Badri. It was my desire to stay here itself for a long time. On the other side of the Alaknanda, there are

8 - 10 isolated, solitary huts. Suffice it to say that I tried to stay in one of them, but did not succeed.

253. Adi Sankara took out the idol of the Lord from Narad Kund and installed it in Badri temple. The temple is a very small one. There are other idols too inside. The Chief Priest shows to travellers the idols of Narada, Kubera and others. The Chief Priest here is called the "Rawal Saheb". In conformity with Sri Adi Sankara's injunction that only Namboodiri Brahmins from Kerala should perform pujas inside the temple, to this day, pujas are being done only by them. The Rawals have special rights, honours and privileges. They were also the Supreme authorities managing the temple. But, latterly, because of lack of proper and right conduct, the temple is under the control of the Government although pujas are even now being performed only by Malayala Brahmins.

254. There is a statue of Narada and also Narada Kund near the temple. Right in the middle of the Alaknanda river, there is also the statue of Narasimha. The spot where Garuda Bhagwan did tapasya is called Garudasila. There is also a small temple of Kedareshwar Mahadev here. Nearby is also situated a statue of Sri Sankara Acharya. There is also the Ramanujakothi, which is the sacred spot of Vaishnavites here. The Koormadhaara is also nearby. Several times I have taken bath there in the spring. The water here is also used for drinking. Gaya pinda has been prescribed for the salvation of the Pitrus(departed souls). For Pindadana to pitrus who do not attain salvation even

with Gayapinda, there is a very sacred tirthasthana here called Brahmakapaalam. It is customary for Pandas to make pilgrims and travellers do pindadana here. Vasudhaara is about 6 miles (9½ km) from here. The sight from here is most splendid indeed. Some Sadhus stay there till the Badrinarayana temple closes for winter. The Muchukunda cave is also nearby. A small temple of Mataji is situated about a mile (1½ km) from the Badri temple.

255. Travellers who manage to reach Badri after undergoing considerable hardships, forget everything else and immerse themselves in the natural beauty of the place. I need hardly mention that I experienced a special bliss. I was fortunate to stay here only for a week. Then I retraced my steps after procuring the Lord's "Prasaadam" and chanting the Hymn:

"Badri Natha Stotram"

*Pavanamandasugandhaseethalahemamandirasobhitam
Sreenikata Gangaavahat Nirmala Sree Badrinatha Visvambharam (1)*

*Seshasamiranakaratanisidinadharatadhyaanamahesvaram
Sreevedabrahma karatayahastuti Sree Badrinaatha Visvambharam (2)*

*Saktigowri ganesasaaradanaaradamuniuchchaaranam
Yogadhyaana asaaraleela Sree Badrinaatha Visvambharam (3)*

*IndrachandraKuberadinakaradhoopadeepaprakaasitam
Siddhamunijanakaratajayajaya Sree Badrinaatha Visvambharam (4)*

*YakshakinnaraKarataKautukajnaanagamyaprakaasitam
Sree LakshmiKamalaachamaradole Sree Badrinaatha Visvambharam (5)*

*Sree Badrinaathadeepancharanapaat paaparinaasunam
Sree SiddhaMunijanakaratajayajaya Sree Badrinaatha Visvambharam. (6)*

256. It was with very great reluctance that I thought of returning from this most sacred spot Badrinath. I returned, by the same route I had taken on the forward journey, with great hope in my mind that, if I am fortunate, I would some day come here again and stay for a few days. After passing through Pandukeshwar. Joshi Math and Peepul chatti, I again reached Chammoli chatti. After resting there for the night, I reached Nanda Prayag. After continuing my walking from Nanda Prayag, I reached Karna Prayag. There is a beautiful temple here. I bathed in the Prayag. Atop the river bank there is a dharmashala with facilities for preparing food. I stayed there for a day or two. Then I started for Sri Nagar. Sri Nagar is a very beautiful place. One should say it is indeed the city of Sree (Sree means Mahalakshmi - prosperity). There are a number of market places. Crossing the Alaknanda river, I reached the other bank. This place is called Garhwal Sri Nagar. In former times, both these places were under the suzerainty of the Maharaja of Tehri. As the Britishers had helped the Maharaja in war, half of Garhwal including one half of Sri Nagar, passed on to the control of the British. After staying there for some days, I reached Kirti Nagar. On the bank of the Alaknanda, at an elevation, there are some cave-like places with facilities for Sadhus to stay. I stayed there.

257. I have already mentioned that it is very difficult for me to walk in this terrain. Somehow, with the Lord's compassion and blessings, I traversed all these regions

and paths. Several times I had faced situations in which I had felt I would simply fall down on the way. When the pain in my leg becomes unbearable, I would simply sit down on the wayside itself and meditate on the Lord, after which the pain disappears and I am able to resume my walking. It is all the Lord's disportation. And now my stomach is experiencing a lot of problems. I had stayed for 6-7 days at Badri Narayana. There is a custom there for travellers to do puja to Sadhus. One traveller got hold of me and fed me. I had to eat a lot of sweetmeats he had procured from the shops. From that day started the problem with my stomach. Ignoring this, by continuous walking when I had reached Kirti Nagar, the stomach problem became very acute. Whom can I approach? God alone is the refuge. When I was thinking on these lines, and experiencing difficulties, a middle-aged Brahmana came to me and began talking to me. He knew Sanskrit very well. I explained to him about my illness. He also knew some medicines. His house was about a mile away from here (1½ km). On his initiative, I accompanied him to his house and spent a few days there. He tried his best to cure my illness but his efforts did not bear fruit. There is a hospital in Sri Nagar. He himself helped me to cross the river and got me admitted to the hospital. I was in the hospital for 8 - 10 days when I got a little relief. One Sri Tara Dutt, a famous Advocate, somehow happened to hear about my case. He was deeply interested in serving Sadhus. He got me discharged from the hospital and took me to a solitary residential unit which belonged to him, situated on the river bank, and made arrangements for me to stay there. His house was in Paudi. Still, he

used to come and stay in this house for rest and relaxation frequently. I must have stayed there for 10-15 days. Then he took me to his house. This house was named "Santi Niketan". I stayed there for a month. Paudi is a hill resort. Even during summer it does not get very warm there. In the garden of that house there were many trees and plants laden with fruits. Oranges were available in plenty in the season. Like Shri Dutt, all the members of the house were also very affectionate towards me. But I did not like this type of living. One day I left without telling anybody and reached Deva Prayag.

258. Just like Hardwar, Deva Prayag is also a pilgrim centre. It is also the abode of Pandas. This is the place of confluence of the Bhagirathi and the Alaknanda. Travellers invariably take their bath at this "sangam"(confluence) and perform libations, sraddha etc for the departed souls. All the priests are Pandas. Travellers give them a fee according to their capacity. There is a temple of Sri Raghunatha (Lord Ram) at this place. Things can be purchased from the shops. Deva Prayag has a large Dharmashala of Kali Kambliwala. I procured a place in that Dharmashala. So long as I was in Paudi, I did not have any stomach trouble. I could get milk and fruits whenever needed, and I used to consume them comfortably. As soon as I left Paudi, my stomach trouble began to worsen. I used to move my bowels now and then and I had no appetite. I was in great difficulty. The Ganga flows quite near the Dharmashala. There is a flight of steps paved with granite, for getting down to the river; there would be

about 30 steps. I was extremely disheartened because of my ailment. I even thought of jumping into the Ganga. One day, around 2 P.M., I began climbing down those steps and reached the last step. When I was about to jump into the river, I heard a voice: "There is a good Bengali Doctor here. He has treated and cured several diseases with his injections. He is a good man who is not particularly greedy for money". When I heard these words, I thought they were intended for me. Thinking that if I acted on them I might get some relief, I desisted from my foolhardy and rash act. I climbed up the steps back to the river bank and made enquiries about the doctor. Then I reached his place and explained to him my case in detail. He showed me a special affection and immediately gave me an injection. After 2 or 3 injections, I became perfectly all right. It was he who gave me milk and other items of food.

259. I now felt perfectly normal and healthy. What should I do now? I decided to go to Uttar Kashi and started for that place. And thus I reached Uttar Kashi again one evening. There I went to my friend and benefactor, Shri Deva Giri Swamiji and prostrated before him. He was very happy. Earlier I had been staying in the hut in Swamiji's control. That place had suited me very well. The Swamiji says: "Several people have been asking for permission to stay in that hut. If you had not come today, it would have been given tomorrow to others. It is good you have come today". So saying, he gave me the keys. Immediately after food at night, I went and occupied the hut and rested there. Listening

to my travel experiences, every one felt sympathy for me.

*"Anyathaa saranam naasti tvameva saranam mama
Tasmaat kaarunyabhaavena raksha raksha Mahesvara".*

CHAPTER - 12

260. I was staying there comfortably. Occasionally I used to go to the Visvanatha temple also for worship. One had to go to Kali Kambliwala's dharmashala for food. There are a large number of Vedanta texts here. Shri Deva Giri Swamiji was a Vedantin and also a devotee and I used to enjoy the pleasure of his company. Now a yativersitya (great Sanyasi) from Belur Math has also come here for penance and made Uttar Kashi his abode. He was an M.A. degree-holder as also very proficient, devoted and affectionate. I had become acquainted with him while I was in Belur Math and that friendship increased a hundred-fold here. We would sit independently somewhere and discuss at length about the Supreme. He was staying at a place called Jnaansu. We used to meet occasionally. One evening while staying at Ujheli, I experienced a great desire to go to Jnaansu and meet him. Sufficient time was not available to go to Jnaansu and return to Ujheli. But I thought somebody was insistently telling me: "go quickly; go!". I reached Jnaansu which was about 2 miles (3 km) away. It was then the cold season. Dhiren Maharaj — that was his name — was sitting, squeezing himself into the corner of a verandah. The village elders had not given him a room to sleep in. He was a very reserved and humble person. Seeing his pitiable condition, I prevailed upon the authorities to get a room vacated and make it available to him for his permanent stay. He was very happy. Realising the import of the Lord's words, "Yogakshemam Vahaamyaham" literally, I felt gratified and returned to Ujheli. In the same place Jnaansu, the

Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was also celebrated. The whole night was spent in Kirtan and bhajans. No one was aware of the passing of time.

261. It became necessary for me to shift again from Ujheli to Laksheswar itself. Throughout the winter I used to walk the distance of 1½ miles (2½ km) from Laksheswar to Kali Kambliwala's dharmashala for bhiksha. It is difficult to forget the Lord who was giving me the strength to stand the rain and the cold. I was experiencing my second winter here. This year the snow fall was not as severe as in the previous one. One need not particularly mention that the cold season is the best for bhajans.

262. In Jnaansu there was an old Sanyasi by name Siddhaasramam. I happened to stay in his Ashram also for a few days. He used to like partaking of Madhurika bhiksha, but he did not have the strength to go from house to house and get Madhurika bhiksha. So I kept going from house to house, get Madhurika bhiksha for him and thus fulfill his desire. "*Dinamapi rajanee saayam praatah sisiravasantau punaraayaatah*". In this manner winter passed and so too did spring and again winter started. My health is slowly deteriorating. I started taking one medicine after another. It is said that diseases rear their head in the absence of suitable food. Although there were friends here to look after me, I decided to leave Uttar Kashi so that I would not be a burden to them. I mentioned this to Dhiren Maharaj.

263. One day around 3 P.M. I bundled up my possessions

and started to go down. God's disportation is strange indeed. I spent that night in a Sadhu's Ashram on the wayside. Although he too gave me some medicines, they had no great effect. The next day, by walking slowly, I passed through Dharaasu and reached Dumda Prayag. I had to pass motion every now and then. What can I do? If one crosses the bridge at Dumda Prayag and goes to the other bank of the river, there are small huts there where one can stay. I got into one of them and sat down. There is no relief in the stomach pain. Motions continued frequently. It was such a pass that I could not even sit down for some time at one place and chant the Lord's names. What indeed is the use of a life like this? Death is any day preferable to this. Having decided thus, I again came near the bridge. The river flows with majesty and profoundness. In the middle, at places, boulders can be seen above the surface of the water. I left behind all my clothes on the bank and climbed atop a jutting rock. Then I jumped into the river. As I knew how to swim, as soon as I fell into the water I swam across to the other bank. "*Jeevitaasaa baleeyasee*". (The desire to survive and live is far too strong - Tr). Then, putting on my clothes, I went back to the hut and sat down.

264. I tried to destroy my body but it did not perish. I again decided that the misery arising from the body was unbearable.

265. Thinking that the body should perish for want of food. I kept on sitting there. I never stirred out in search of food. That area was absolutely deserted.

Because I had fallen into the Ganga, the body had become very cool. The urge to pass motion frequently became reduced in intensity. I spent the night there, thinking intently about God. The next day, while I was sitting there with no intention of going out anywhere, a great person came there with Khir(sweetened rice and milk). A good joke indeed! Eagerly I drank all of the Khir. He was a great Sanyasi who was staying a bit far away. I do not know how he came to know about me. He told me insistently: "There is no point at all in your staying here. There are some villages at a little distance from here. If you go there, you may be able to get food of your liking and milk". So saying, he pointed out to me the direction of the villages and left.

266. Delightedly I reached the village pointed out by him, after crossing a small stream. There was a small temple there. I occupied a portion of the verandah there. Around 10-11 A.M. every morning, I would go to the houses in the village for bhiksha. When I call at 3 or 4 houses, I get adequate food. Uttar Khand is indeed heaven. Sadhus can get food everywhere there. The moment people in a house hear the words "Narayana Harih", somebody or the other will always come out invariably and offer some food or the other with devotion. I stayed here comfortably for a few days. The hill-dwellers in these parts were not in the habit of cooking rice fully. The rice they cook and eat would be more or less like the "Kozhukkattai" of the south.(balls of rice paste and coconut scrapings semi-boiled in water - Tr). I used to bring the rice with me, mix it with buttermilk, throw away the hard portions and consume

the rest. Now my body began to grow thicker and fatter. I could understand that this was on account of accretion of fluids in my tissues (what is called in Ayurvedic parlance in Kerala as "disturbance of the fluid equilibrium" - Tr). April-May and Vishu (the first day of the Malayalam month Mesha and the Tamil month Chithirai - Tr) were also passed here itself.

267. Deciding that it was not advisable to stay on here any longer, I again started. I came to the place near the bridge. Crossing the bridge, I took the path which leads to Tehri. With the passing of every moment, I was feeling the body to be more and more of a burden. The feeling that somehow or the other, I should destroy the body, was becoming stronger and stronger. *En route* I encountered a forest which I entered. Chopped firewood pieces were lying there. It was noon time. I made a pyre out of those wood pieces. I removed all my clothes and hung them up on the four sides of the pyre. I covered myself up with a dhoti(veshty). I had also a brass vessel with me. I sat down on one side of the pyre, facing myself towards the Ganga. I began to meditate on God intensely. Striking a match stick from a match-box I had with me, I set my clothes alight. The fire started flaring up on all the four sides. When the heat became unbearable, I leapt out of the pyre. The one or two rupees I had with me also got sacrificed in the fire. All that I had left with me now were the dhoti which I had wrapped around me and the brass vessel.

268. The clothes around the pyre were only just beginning to burn, but without caring for that, or

without even looking at the pyre or at that place itself, I again reached the wayside. Sheer madness! I am coming across people known to me. They are surprised. I feel terribly hungry. When I reach a Sadhu's place, he gladly gives me food. I resume walking again. By dusk I reach a village. I did not feel any particular need for food, but how and where was I to spend the night? Clothes are the very life-line of mountain dwellers. They are totally unwilling to lend even one bit of clothing to a Sadhu just for one night. Nevertheless, I was forced by circumstances to ask them for some clothes, but who is there to give me?.

269. Noticing that, slightly away from the village, there was a somewhat better-looking class of house, I went there. That was a Christian house. The house and surroundings had been kept very clean. As soon as I reached the house, all the members of the household came out and surrounded me. They had a fair knowledge of the English language too. I explained to them my need. They gladly provided me with a blanket for use at night. I returned to the village and slept well. Considering that I had destroyed clothes costing about fifty rupees, I considered it to be a blessing that I could, although with some difficulty, procure the use of this blanket. The next morning I returned it to them. The next day I continued my journey. The need for frequent motions arose again. Somehow I reached Tehri and went straight to the hospital. The Chief Medical Officer there was Dr. Pandit Vachaspati M.B.B.S. As soon as I talked to him, he admitted me in the hospital as an in-patient. There was a high school there and

some teachers from there used to come and see me in the hospital regularly. My illness began to abate. One day I met High Court Judge Babu Ganga Prasadji. Immediately he invited me to his house, took me there and made arrangements for me to stay there with him. My health began to improve with the good food available there. I must have stayed in Tehri for a month or two. My time was spent in an early morning dip in the Ganga, Japa, Meditation, going out for bhiksha and other connected activities.

270. From Tehri I went to the farm-house of Seth Murli Dhar and stayed there for some days. From there I reached Mussoorie. My illness recurred. I proceeded to Dehra Dun, and from there by train to Hardwar. From there I went to the Sri Ramakrishna Seva Ashram. At that time the "Bada" Maharaj there was Shri Kalyanandji and the "Chhota" Maharaj Shri Nischalanandji. Both of these great persons had a special affection for me. Shri Nirmalananda Swamiji also happened to be there at that time. I got a separate room all to myself. It was only then that I realised what my disease was. It was piles. They also expressed the opinion that it could be easily cured by a surgical operation. For that one had to go to Kashi or some such place. I did not have a single paisa with me. How can I go there?

271. A Hindustani Sadhu happened to come to my room. After understanding the details of my illness, he told me, "I do not have any faith in medical treatment. All diseases can be cured by meditation and bhajan of the

Lord. The best place for doing meditation and bhajan is Brindaban. You go there, stay there and do bhajan"; so saying, he gave me five rupees for expenses. I decided to go to Brindaban. When I reached there, I stayed for 2-3 days in the Ramakrishna Ashram. Piles is a troublesome disease. It will not let you remain at the same place for some time; one has to go out frequently for passing stools. How indeed can one perform bhajanam in these circumstances? So I began to think that I must get away to some other place. Without any definite plan in my mind, I reached the railway station. There were several persons getting ready for catching trains there. When I asked one of them he replied he was proceeding to Agra. I decided that I too would go there. I reached there one morning. I had gathered during the rail journey that there was a good hospital there. As soon as I got down from the train I made enquiries about the hospital and reached it. The doctors examined me and asked me whether I was willing to get surgery done. I indicated my ready willingness and they accepted me as an in-patient.

272. In the hospital there are a large number of patients at all times. The doctors used to pay special attention to the patients. The hospital was administered by an eminent European lady. All patients had to wear a white uniform in that hospital. I was wearing the Kashaya Vastras of a Sanyasi. That noble and compassionate lady came to me and requested me to wear the white uniform. When I explained to her that to remove the Kashaya Vastra and wear the white uniform would be a violation of Sanyasa dharma, she

very kindly permitted me to continue wearing my Sanyasi dress. So I continued to wear it. That noble lady also provided all necessary facilities for my stay in the hospital. It had started raining occasionally but the heat did not subside. I had been allotted a place in the verandah.

273. This is also a kind of tapasya. I spent the time remembering God. The date for the surgical operation was fixed. On the day prior to the operation, after finishing shaving of the required parts of my body, they gave me an emetic, a medicine for causing bowel movement. I passed motion very satisfactorily. Ordinarily patients are given only milk on that day, but inadvertently, they brought me rice and curries. As I was feeling very hungry, I ate well with relish. The doctors came to know about this, but decided to go ahead with the operation nevertheless. Around 10 AM on the day of the operation, they made me lie down on a bench and carried me into the operation theatre. I felt as though I was being carried into the room of Yama, the god of death, and the persons standing at the door of the room appeared to be Yama's attendants. The doctor was a Bengali gentleman. Some medical students were also standing in the room. After removing all my clothes, they made me lie down on the operation table. They made me smell something. It must have been chloroform. They made me count 1,2,3..... I remember having counted up to 4 or 5. After doing something to me they took me back to my old place and made me lie down there. It was only then that I recovered consciousness. Intolerable pain. The patients

lying beside me had already become my friends and disciples. They began to fan me. I bore everything courageously.

274. By evening I developed an irresistible urge to pass motion. I evacuated comfortably. Along with the stools whatever the doctors had put by way of stitches also got expelled. This was the result of my taking food the previous day. The doctor came and did all sorts of things.

275. I had to stay in the hospital for 20 days. I could say that I was fairly all right. I was discharged from the hospital with the approval of the lady administrator.

276. Where will I go now? And what will I do? I have a great desire for food. But I have no money with me. Some people happened to tell me, "A well-known Mahatma (Sadhu) lives a little far away from here, by name Aalu Baba. He does not allow any one to stay with him. Anyhow, you go and meet him. He may perhaps agree to your staying there". I stayed for 2-3 days at some places on the banks of the Yamuna river. It was a time of flood there. It was a good sight to see lots of people standing in rows in the river water, holding aloft flags and jumping and dancing. I reached Aalu Baba's Ashram one evening. I met him and explained my situation. He permitted me to stay there as long as I wanted. That was a totally deserted place, situated on the river bank. They have also made a cave here. Daily from 5 P.M., spiritual subjects are discussed. Several gentlemen come and listen to this regularly with devotion. I too used to be present there at that

time. The Baba used to teach Bhagavad Gita and Panchadasi also at that time.

277. "*Aayuh Satvabalaarogyasukhapreetivivardhanam*". It is this type of saatvik food (noble and whole-some food) that the Baba takes. I too get the same food, "*Yuktaahaara vihaarasya yuktacheshtasya karmasu yukta svapnaavabodhasya yogo bhavati dukhahaa*" — his life also conformed to this dictum. I live happily here. My piles trouble has not left me completely. Some vaidyas too happened to come there. One of them prescribed a course of treatment. With that treatment the problem was eradicated completely. After that I have never had that trouble till today.

278. In this manner I spent a few days there. Some of the gentlemen who used to come there to listen to the discourses used to show special respect towards me. One of them told me: "Should you need money for bus or rail fare for going somewhere, I shall give you". Although I went to Brindaban, I was not fortunate enough to stay there for some days and enjoy the stay. I desired to go to Brindaban, which was the scene of the Lord's disportations, again. That gentleman gave me some money.

279. The Taj Mahal is one of the principal attractions in Agra. One feels that a special peace reigns inside it. Is not love a divine trait? Not merely the beautiful building but every plant, spring, fountain, stone, flower there announces the glory of love. Nobody would be

willing to leave this place soon. I also felt extremely contented.

280. With the permission and blessings of Aalu Baba, I again reached Brindaban from Agra. I stayed there at some place. I would go to the Ashram too occasionally. I visited all the principal places in Brindaban. I visited Gokulam too. I did not at all like to roam about like this. My greatest desire was to stay at one place and do meditation and bhajanam. Ultimately I went to Nandagram. I must have stayed there for a month or more. I stayed at a place called Yasoda Ghat. Shri Krishna's idol was verily "*Saundaryottaratopi sundarataram*". (More beautiful than beauty itself - Tr). I used to go to the temple daily in the morning and in the evening and meditate. Most of the people here are devoted vairagis.

281. There are several sub-divisions or sects among Sadhus. Vaishnavites, Saivites, Sitaramas and others form part of vairagis. They do not wear saffron robes. Even among saffron-clad Sanyasis there are several sub-divisions. Chief among them are the "*Dasanaami*" followers of Sri Adi Sankara. Then there are several others like Udaasis, Kabirpanthis and so on. In this place, "Maaladhaaris" and white-clad Sadhus abound. Most of the time, Kirtans, japas and grand feasts will be taking place in the houses here. I too used to attend some of these.

282. The offerings of food to the Lord in the temple at noon time are prepared by a different house by rotation

each day. After offering the food to the Lord, i.e. after doing the Naivedya, the members of the concerned household and their near and dear ones sit down in the place earmarked for it and consume the items as prasad. Sometimes I too would get a share of these. I generally used to take bath in tanks or ponds. I again became affected by malaria. I needed a change of place. Via Kanpur I reached Unnao. The Sessions Judge there, Shri Gangashankar, was a very noble person, known to me. After staying at his house for about a week and resting there, with the intention of reaching Uttar Kashi and staying there, I reached Dehra Dun by train. From there I reached the headquarters of a famous Mahant who was a follower of Guru Nanak. All those who came there used to receive "Annadanam" (poor feeding) without any regard for caste, creed or faith. This establishment had, in the suburbs, a large flower garden, where small residential units were also available for Sadhus to stay. I decided to stay there for some days. Several persons told me that, because of very heavy snowfall that year, the road to Uttar Kashi had become blocked and impassable. I did not have enough clothes with me. I stayed in this garden for over a month. I also visited several places near Dehra Dun which were quite livable. At last I proceeded from there and reached Rishikesh. I stayed there for a few days. About 2 miles (3 km) from Rishikesh there is an establishment called Svargaashram. This place is very beautiful and affords a lot of solitude. And there are several huts there which are ideal for Sadhus to stay in and meditate. My gurubhais were also staying there. So I too shifted to that place from Rishikesh and started living in a hut.

From the main "Annasatra"(food station), I used to get adequate food for one meal a day, around 10 o'clock in the morning.

283. For the evening, I get snacks from another Dharmashala. I got the use of a hut near the river bank for my stay. I continued to stay there, enjoying the bliss of the daily dip in the Ganga and darshan of the river. There is an extensive forest land here. It is also very convenient and pleasurable to go for a stroll and exercise oneself in the evening, enjoying the sight of the river and the forest. Here several noble Sadhus live in separate huts. Their company is also available to me freely. Shri Sivananda Swamiji who has now attained great fame, was there at that time. I was able to become acquainted with him and secure his friendship. He had been practising the medical profession in Malaysia-Singapore. He returned from there in order to live the life of an ordinary Sadhu and started living in Svargaashram in a good hut facing the Ganga. There is no doubt whatsoever that he was very generous and compassionate by nature. A person who, from birth, is compassionate to others in misery, will evolve spiritually in life and attain the highest state. He was staying here with great determination and was doing tapas. Despite all this, he used to consider it extremely pleasant to treat sick persons and give them as much relief as possible. "Feel, feel for the sick and the poor, the downtrodden and the destitute". This attitude of sympathy and compassion shone in him particularly. Neither jealousy nor arrogance could come anywhere near him. If not these great traits, what else

has made him famous in this world? I too imbibed some good qualities from this great personality.

284. All in all, my stay in Svargaashram appealed to me and I enjoyed it. Occasionally Sadhus used to be given feasts here. One day when I reached the Satram for bhiksha, I was informed that it was a "feast" day and that bhiksha would be delayed. So, instead of returning to my hut, I visited a nearby lonely forest and sat down there and meditated. I enjoyed a special bliss then. "*Eesaavaasyam idam sarvam*". Some idea of this great truth started sprouting in my mind then. When one develops a sense of identity with everything because of the firm conviction arising from the truth "*Sarvam Vishnu mayam*" and one sees identity even with trees and creepers, it became totally impossible for me even to pluck a single leaf from a tree. Just for a few moments I experienced this state of total identity. *It is only now that I begin to commence my spiritual journey in life.* I felt I am standing for election to the Lord's Parliament. I mentioned about this to Swami Sivananda also in conversations.

285. Then I went and got the bhiksha, returned to my place and ate the food and rested. From that day I experienced a growing desire to remain inside a forest. The places in Svargaashram where the Gita Bhavan and other buildings are situated now, were all forest land then. Whenever I used to get the opportunity, I used to go to the forest and sit in it. One could see wild elephants also there. Sometimes 3 or 4 of them would come to the riverside to bathe, drink water and play.

For about 20 days I enjoyed the bliss of this stay on the bank of the Ganga and meditation inside the forest. For bhiksha I must go to the food station. That glorious walk in splendid isolation in that divinely peaceful forest is as fresh in my mind even now as it was when I was actually living there. If some people think that it is totally unnecessary to leave home and hearth for the forest in search of God, because God is everywhere, in the home as well as in the forest — What is there one can do about it?.....?

286. While I was thus staying in the forest, one day a stranger came there and fell at my feet. That white-clad person was middle-aged and extremely weak and incapable. He was very insistent that he should also stay near me. I gave all my attention to nursing him — when the river of fate brings along a duty to be done, I am always attentive to it and try to perform it to the best of my ability. It is impossible to describe the boundless happiness and joy he experiences when I bring Ganga water and wash his head with it. The food from the food station used to provide liberally for his needs too. He had five rupees with him which he handed over to me. With that money, I procured a blanket and gave it to him. For about a week I was constantly attending to him and nursing him. He had all sorts of diseases. Although I told him I would take him to the hospital, he did not accept my suggestion. I saw that my nursing had absolutely no effect. When I realised that he had not improved and that all my nursing was a sheer waste, what I did was to leave that place. What I learned when I came back later was that, after I had

left, somebody had come and taken him to the hospital and got him admitted.

287. One day I went for a walk for some distance from my hut in Svargaashram. Hardly half a mile away, there is a school as well as a temple. The people here usually give roasted chana to Sadhus. After accepting some chana, I kept on walking along the river bank until I reached a place near a bridge where a Brahmachari, Pyarelal, was staying. He was staying here for some time like a Sadhu. There is an orchard of plantain trees there. I met the Brahmachari and talked to him. As I had the chana with me, there was no need for any other food. It was too late to return to Svargaashram. He showed me a hut, a little away, for my night's rest. I spent the night there comfortably. At 5 o' clock the next morning, he woke me up and told me, "I am now going to Rishikesh. You also come with me. You can reach Swargaashram early". I did not have the heart to leave that place and go elsewhere — that place, Brahmapuri, was very enchanting. I told him "Swamiji, you kindly go. I have no desire to go". So saying, I continued to sit there, firmly rooted to that place. He got angry and went away. I performed my morning ablutions, and sat there doing japa and meditation, without any other thought.

288. It is about 10 A.M. 3 or 4 persons arrive at my hut, armed with provisions for cooking food. They had come with the intention of preparing the food and eating, resting for a while, and then going away. They also had milk with them. When they saw me, they were very

happy. First they gave me some milk to drink. Then they went and had their bath, came back and prepared food. They fed me first. It was only then that they took food. Then they rested and went away by about 4 P.M. They had not used up all the provisions they had brought. They told me, "Swamiji may, if he needs, make use of all these provisions". So saying, they left behind all the unused rice,atta,dal,salt, ghee, chillies and other items and went away. I accepted all those things, overwhelmed by God's infinite compassion. It was summer then. I went in the evening too to the Ganga river, had a very pleasant bath, and came back to my place and sat there, immersed in contemplation of God. It started getting dark. Pyarelal came to me in a hurry. He was completely taken by surprise to see the rice and other provisions lying on the floor in front of me. I explained all that had happened and offered all the provisions to him. The Brahmachari was very happy and he also showed respect to me.

289. I stayed there for 3 full days. After that the Brahmachari himself showed me a place. It seems that it was in that place that the famous Shri Rama Tirtha did tapasya. Hence that place was called Rama Guha. Rama Guha was something like a cave or a mandap made of a single large stone. It was about 20 feet high (6 metres) and deep and had a perimeter of about 25 feet (7½ metres) at the bottom. The bottom is somewhat hollow. The top is flat, like a sloping roof. This single stone remains in the fine sand, a little removed from the flow of the Ganga river. If one digs out and removes some of the large quantity of sand that has accumulated

at the bottom, one can comfortably stay in it as though in a cave. Even in the height of summer, one does not unduly feel the heat inside it. In winter too, it does not get very cold inside it. I decided to stay there itself. I dug up some sand from inside it and threw it outside; then it became possible to sit and lie down inside it. However, one has to be very cautious when one gets up, in order to ensure that one does not knock one's head against the top of the stone.

290. The Brahmachari also told me that, if approached, the organisers of Kali Kambliwala's dharmashala would provide provisions for 15 days at a time to Sadhus. The very next day itself, when I went to Rishikesh and met the Mahant and Manager, Sri Muni Ram of the Dharmashala, he agreed. First I went to Svargaashram and brought all my clothes to Rama Guha. The rations are issued every fifteen days, on the New Moon and Full Moon days. The fortnightly rations — rice, wheat flour, ghee, sugar etc. — would weigh about 10 seers (more than 20 pounds). Brahmapuri is about 4-5 miles (6½ -8 km) from Kali Kambliwala's dharmashala. It became a burden for me to bring the rations all the way to Rama Guha. What can I do?. *Asaadhyamaayullathil aasa pettaal asahyamaayulloru dukhamuntaam*". (Translation of this Malayalam sloka: - "If desire develops in the impossible, then unbearable misery and hardship will befall " - Tr). Consoling myself that all this effort is for ultimate removal of all difficulties and misery, I did not consider all this as a great burden. I carried half the rations to a point midway between the dharmashala and the Rama Guha

and kept it safely in a place. Then I walked back and brought the remaining half. In this manner, in 1 or 2 days I completed the transport of the entire rations to Rama Guha. Thereafter, without any other problem I spent my time in contemplation of God. Sometimes, guests used to come. I used to honour them also to the best of my ability.

291. Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary is on the "dvitiya" (second day of the lunar fortnight) after Shivaratri. Here in Rama Guha, I celebrated the pooja excellently. Over and above the Mission Gurubhais, other noted and great personalities like Shri Sivananda Swamiji, Shri Tapovana Swamiji and Govinda Giri Swamiji also attended. They too felt very happy.

CHAPTER - 13

VASISHTHA GUHA

292. During the rainy season, the whole of Rama Guha gets submerged in water. I must therefore leave the place when the rains start. From July to October, my stay will, as before, have to be in Svargaashram. So I came back to Svargaashram. When the rains were over, I again went back to Brahmapuri. This time a Brahmachari also came along to stay with me. This boy had somehow reached me in Svargaashram from Travancore. He was keen to learn Sanskrit also. I began to teach him a little. When I was leaving for Brahmapuri, he also came with me and stayed with me. He used to help in bringing the rations from Rishikesh. When I was staying in Brahmapuri like this, a forest department official happened to come and see me. He mentioned to me about Vasishtha Guha. He happened to extol the virtues of Vasishtha Guha by saying that it was one of the best places for tapasya and that one could stay there in peace at all times without having to go anywhere else. My mind became attracted to Vasishtha Guha on mere hearing of its name. And I remained, awaiting an opportunity for going there.

293. It is now June. On June 19, 1928, at 10 A.M. in the morning, we packed all our possessions in a gunny bag and kept the sack covered in a pit which we dug in the sand. We had also consulted people and ascertained the route. What is the route? One has only to go right along the bank of the Ganga river. The

name of the lad who was with me was Madhavan. Madhavan did not lack courage. Since there was no experience of travelling along such a route, at times it became necessary to swim along the river. However, when, with difficulty, we reached Sivapuri, it was already dark. We lay down, tired, on the sand itself, on the river bank. At that time 3 or 4 Sadhus too happened to come there; they too were proceeding to Vasishtha Guha. They had articles of food with them. They too lay down on the sand itself. They too had undergone difficulties as they were also not familiar with the route. Vasishtha Guha is 4-5 miles (6½ - 8 km) from here. They decided to engage the services of a coolie familiar with the route. They set off at dawn and we too left with them. Around 10 A.M. we reached Vasishtha Guha. My mind experienced great happiness. Jai Ram, Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram (That was June 20, 1928 - Tr.)

294. I have never seen a place like this. A tranquil, serene place. By the right side of the Guha, Mother Ganga flows gently along. There are no houses anywhere in the vicinity. At that time an individual was staying in the Main Guha. There is a small "Cavelet" to the left of the Main Guha. There a Brahmachari was staying. First we went to the main Guha and met its occupant. He was a rich house-holder; but indifference to Sadhus was what we saw in him. Next, both of us went and saw the Brahmachari who was staying in the cavelet. He invited us for food. The other Sadhus who had come along with us, had brought along with them provisions with which they started making food separately. We both had our bath, japa etc; and ate the food offered

with devotion by the Brahmachari; and then rested. The others also rested after taking food.

295. The spot attracted me ever so much. I did not have the heart to leave this place, no. All my things were in Brahmapuri. With the firm determination that, come what may, I shall return here next year and stay here permanently, we got ready to start back for Brahmapuri. The Brahmachari restrained us from leaving. Lovingly he insisted, "Only after all of us have had food tomorrow, must you leave". All of us accepted; and we spent the night on the sand bank itself.

296. The Brahmachari leaves immediately for the village for bhiksha. The nearest village is at least 3 miles (5 km) away. It is all a series of ascents and descents and the path is practically impassable. See how much devotion he has towards Sadhus; and compare it with the mentality of the rich house-holder occupying the main Guha. It is all God's disport.

297. The next day the Brahmachari seats us all on the bank of the Ganga and feeds us. That was indeed a grand feast. After food, with the permission of the Brahmachari, all of us started on the return journey. A survey party of officers and staff was camping a little farther away. They had a river craft (row-boat) tied up on this bank of the river for their use. Thinking that the route along the other bank would be more convenient, we crossed the river in that craft. This was the 21st June, 1928. Heavy rains started and I got completely drenched. That also seemed pleasant,

somehow. By the next afternoon, we reached Brahmapuri. Retrieving our things from the pit in which we had stored them, we started staying in Rama Guha.

298. Some days passed like this. One night we had finished our food. It was around 11 P.M. I was seated on a high rock on the river bank and meditating. The lad who was with me was deep asleep inside the Rama Guha. Just then I heard a peculiar sound. When I looked, I saw that the water was roaring down. An arrival as fierce as that of an elephant in rut. I got up and ran down to the Guha and roused the lad, collected what odd things I could in a hurry and ran up with the lad to Pyarelal's orchard. It was a sudden flash flood of the Ganga. All at once the Guha was submerged in water. If we had delayed even by a few moments, both of us would have perished, leaving only our names behind.

299. We stayed at this orchard for 2-3 days. Pyarelal was not there. A youngster from Mysore was staying there then. He was a very impulsive and excitable lad. Some dispute and argument arose between that lad and the lad who was staying with me, Madhavan. There were a large number of plantain trees and plantain bunches in that orchard. Pyarelal used to give us plantain fruits several time to eat. It seems Madhavan had plucked a few unripe(green) plantain fruits for preparing a curry. When that Mysore lad saw this, he came running to Madhavan, got angry and abused him and slapped him. Madhavan began to kill him. I

prevented him. I not only talked to that Mysore lad affectionately, but also gave him some eatables.

300. The same day I left the place and reached Svargaashram. The Mysore lad became afraid and he went away some where. From Svargaashram we went for darshan to Neelakanta Mahadev. That is an elevated place where one does not feel the heat of the summer very much. There are dharmashalas too for staying. After darshan and 2-3 days' stay there, we returned to Svarga Ashram. I decided to spend the entire rainy season in Svargaashram itself. Sivananda Swamiji is also nearby. I stayed very happily in the midst of great Sadhus. In the rainy season, most people here get fever. Sivananda Swamiji treats them all affectionately and with care. I too have been a patient like the others.

301. Now I am spending the time eagerly awaiting the close of the rainy season. From the very first sight Vasishtha Guha has been occupying pride of place in my heart. In October 1929, armed with a blanket and other things, I started for Vasishtha Guha, alone. Upto Sivapuri there is no place on the way, fit for rest. At night I would lie down just somewhere. "The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed, and food what chance may bring. (what fear has the) Sanyasin bold! Say "Om tat sat, Om". (The Guruji has himself given the above translation in English of the original Malayalam verse, which also he has given immediately after the English rendering. It reads: "Puramukalallo gaganavisaalam, sayyaa bhootalam, etu labhikkum bhakshanam atu

taan. Sanyaasikkoru bhayame illa. Sthira chithan
thaan. Om Tat Sat Om" - Tr.).

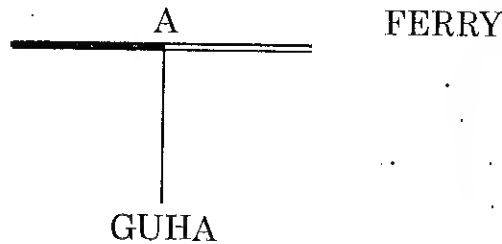
302. Starting again the next morning, I reached a village on the right bank of the Siva river near Sivapuri. There is a brahmana there by name Kanniah. I kept my things at his place. After bath I happily ate the "Pahaadi" food he gave me. When these "Pahaadis" (hill-dwellers) see clothes they will certainly demand them. I presented him with a blanket. He also gave me a clothing in return. After resting a while, I left half my things with him and started for Vasishtha Guha with my remaining clothes etc. By 5 o'clock in the evening, I reached Vasishtha Guha. O, what a good fortune (to be here)! I went straight to the Guha. The same person whom I saw last year is still in the main Guha. Along with him he also has a pahaadi as his attendant. I was extremely tired after the arduous travel. I enter the Guha. That person does not even look at me. Whatever it be, I kept all my things there and myself sat down. I told him: "Lalaji, I am extremely tired after prolonged walking. I am feeling extremely hungry and thirsty also. If you will kindly give me some provisions, I shall myself prepare some food and take it". "There is nothing here", was the immediate response. One could clearly see tinfuls of provisions stacked there. I had one or two rupees with me. I again told him, "These things here, are they not rice and wheat flour? I do not want anything free. Here, take this money and give me something to eat. - *"Paalam kulungiaalum kelan kulungukayilla"* (Translation of this Malayalam proverb.) Even if the bridge were to shake violently,

Kelan will not shake a bit" - Kelan is the name of a very courageous person - Tr). What he exhibited was either extra-ordinary courage or wickedness. I was perplexed what to do. There were no houses anywhere nearby. This person is a total stranger; and night is fast approaching. In this difficult situation, just as on previous occasions, the purport of the Lord's assurance "*Yogakshemam vahaamyaham*" once again became clear on this occasion too. "Maharaj, please come with me. There you can have food and take rest" —these words issue from the mouth of the pahaadi brahmin who is the attendant of the occupant of the cave. I felt very happy and asked him - "How far is your house?". He answered: "Very close by" and I started with him. Telling me frequently, "It is right here, it is very close", he made me climb up and down hillocks and made me walk not less than 3 miles (5 km) before we reached his house.

303. His house is atop a hill. Nearby is a water-fall. He has fields and cattle. He has an elder brother who is also very generous by nature. I was given milk first. At night I was given good food. I slept well. The next day also I spent there and got rid of my weariness. On the third day in the early morning, I started from there. After drinking the milk that was offered to me at a house on the way, I returned by the route by which I had gone to the Pahaadi's house.

304. How can I stay in this region in this most enfeebled condition? I came to the conclusion that life in a cave would be impossible. Near the Guha, there was a ferry

boat for crossing over to the other bank of the river. I decided that, going by the ferry, I would cross the river and go back to the Svargaashram. The relative positions of the ferry and the Guha may be illustrated diagrammatically like this:



When I reached the Point 'A' some unknown power attracted me strongly back to the Guha and I returned to the Guha itself. I never went anywhere near that Babu. I have already mentioned that, to the left of the main Guha, there is a small "cavelet". There was no body then in that "cavelet". I went there and sat inside it.

305. Then I had my bath in the Ganga. Doing Japa and meditation, I stayed on in the cavelet. It must be 12 Noon now. Villa — the Babu's attendant — gave me some food on a leaf. After eating that food and drinking Ganga water, I lay down in the cavelet and slept. I decided that I must stay here itself, come what may. In the morning, after finishing my bath etc, and taking my clothes, I go to the occupant of the main Guha and tell him: "O, Lalaji! I have to cross the river and go to Sivapuri to bring back my clothes. I shall be returning tomorrow. Till then let these clothes be here". Lalaji

replied, "Do not keep them anywhere here. If somebody takes them away, do not ask me". Nevertheless I deposited the bundle of clothes there itself and crossed the river without a thought.

306. Lakhs and lakhs of sawn timber logs from several mountains are transported up to Hardwar via the Ganga river. There are contractors and several coolies(workers) for this. Some of these coolies swim the river with the help of leather bags. These people are called "Sinaiwalas". I now crossed the Ganga river by sitting on their back. After crossing the river again at Kottugram village, I reached the house where I had left behind my clothes. After having a comfortable meal, I spent the night there itself.

307. The next morning, after crossing the Siva river, I proceeded to the Guha by the same route which I had first followed. It was past noon when I reached the Guha. I went to the main Guha, collected my bundle of clothes which I had kept there, came to the cavelet and, stretching my feet, lay down there. Where can I get food here at this time? In any case there is no dearth of Ganga water!

*"Hare Rama Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare;
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare".*

308. The next morning I finished my morning bath. Now where to go? The nearest village is about 3 miles (5 km) away. It is not possible to manage without going. So after remembering the Guru devotedly, I set out for bhiksha. Crossing hillock and valley, and after walking for about a mile and a half (about 2½ km), I see a large banyan tree. I sat beneath it for some time, enjoying the pure breeze. Nearby I see a house. Going in front of that house and uttering "Narayana Harih", I beg for bhiksha. Immediately a tall, dark, middle-aged woman comes out and asks me what I want. I said, "I am feeling very hungry. Kindly give me something to eat". The woman's husband was also there. They had a son aged about 6 or 7. Very gladly they brought me some chapatis and rice in a bowl. As I was very hungry, I ate with relish and rested there for a while.

309. The village is still about a mile (1½ km) away. If I go there, I would be able to get bhiksha. So I started for the village. It is a steep ascent. I lost my way. That is nothing unusual. I found myself inside a big forest. Unable to extricate myself and come out, I continued to sit there itself. I should have sat like that for about an hour. I am perfectly at home in meditating on God even inside a forest. Then one gentleman happened to come there. He told me: "How did Swamiji happen to come here? This is a terrible place. There are lots of tigers and bears here". When I told him I had lost my way, that person himself escorted me and took me to the

correct path. And I reached the village where I wanted to go. It was about 3 P.M. then.

310. Almost all the residents of this village are Brahmanas. Agriculture is their mainstay. They also keep cows and buffalos. Almost all the work is done by the women — such as, climbing big trees and gathering bundles of leaves for feeding the cattle; carrying bundles as head loads over long distances and returning home with them by dusk; grazing the cattle; milking them; churning curd; grinding wheat etc. The men folk only till the land; all other work is done by the women. Generally there are very few thieves in Uttar Khand. Every one exerts himself to earn a livelihood through hard labour. Even vessels and other articles that may be lying outside Ashrams and residential houses do not get stolen. But now things have changed for the worse. When Sadhus reach their door-steps, these people immediately offer them something.

311. I did bhiksha. That day I received about 4 seers (more than 8 pounds) of materials. This was adequate to see me through for 10-15 days. That night I rested in that village itself. The next morning I reached the Guha. After finishing bath etc, I prepared chapati and dal and took it. I had also received a small quantity of ghee as bhiksha. When the occupant of the main Guha realised that I had no intention of leaving, his attitude changed and he started becoming favourably inclined towards me.

312. He is an expert cook — what is called a "Nala

paakam" ("A veritable Nala in cooking" - king Nala of the olden times — husband of Damayanti — was an expert cook of wide repute - Tr). And whatever he cooks, he does it in a jiffy. Sometimes he used to invite me also for food, but I used to remain aloof. I did not like to go to him even for borrowing fire when the fire in my cavelet happened to go out. I had no match-box with me, nor was it possible to get one anywhere nearby. Once I had to go in search of fire to the next house — 3 miles (5 km) away. By the time I negotiated all those ascents and descents and returned to the Guha after borrowing fire from the nearest neighbour, 4 hours had gone. When I was sitting in the cavelet, thinking of this total loss of 4 hours in the forenoon, a person comes and sees me after crossing the Ganga by ferry. He had a match box which he gave me. The same afternoon, a noble person from Rishikesh happened to send me 6 match boxes. And thus I stayed here, clearly seeing and experiencing God's compassion.

313. It was now the month of Mesha (April-May), the harvesting season for wheat, If one now goes from village to village, one can get as much wheat as one needs. The water-mill for grinding wheat is also available nearby. One cannot go anywhere in the rainy season. To the right is the Ganga, in front is the Siva river, and to the left and rear are large forests. So where indeed can one go? Some people not merely told me, but insisted that even now I should collect and store all the provisions needed for the rainy season. The occupant of the main Guha also told me, "I myself

shall give you all the provisions you may need for the rainy season", but I did not accept his offer.

314. When I am thus in a mood of indecision, a person acquainted with me comes to the Guha. He was a most affectionate, hardy young man. His name was Narayana Giri. He was also very detached. When I was living on Bilva fruits in Brahmapuri, he used to bring me very sweet bilva fruits now and then. Even now he has come with a load of bilva fruits. I was very happy. The next morning I got ready to go to the village for bhiksha. Narayana Giri also expressed a desire to accompany me. He was a great soul and I did not wish to give him any trouble, but he insisted on coming. So I told him that he could come if he would stay permanently with me; he agreed to that. Accordingly, along with him, I wandered in 3 or 4 villages for bhiksha. In one or two days I could get about one maund (37 kilos) of wheat. I had great difficulty in carrying that burden. It was he who carried the entire burden, had the wheat ground into flour, and stored the powder neatly in tins. I thought that he would be staying with me in the Guha but one day when I was returning after bath in the Ganga, I found him missing. It must have been to Rishikesh that he had gone.

315. I continued in the Guha alone. Sometimes some great souls would come there. And in this manner, days came and went and the rains set in. Ganga began to swell. Sri Krishna Ashtami in Simha (August-September) too passed. And the floods subsided.

316. I had run out of salt. I went to the village in search of some salt. The elders in the village leave early in the morning to the fields and other places to begin their work of agriculture etc. At that time, there would be only children in the houses, and they had strict instructions not to give anything to anybody even if asked. I had reached a village in the morning. I requested for salt in some houses. None would give me any salt. They used to bring salt all the way from Rishikesh with difficulty and even children knew the value of salt and would not give it away. I then went to the house near the Banyan tree in the village, where I had first gone for bhiksha. Here too there were no elders; only a little boy was there. When I requested him for salt, he gladly brought two handfuls of it and gave it to me. I was very happy with the boy and asked him what he wanted. Unhesitatingly he replied, "I want you to teach me". Saying I would do it, I returned to the Guha.

317. It became necessary for me to go to Rishikesh soon. While there, I procured a Hindi Primer, a slate and writing paper and returned to the Guha. I went to the boy's house and showed him the book. He was very happy. From the next day he began to come to the Guha daily. He must be coming after food. I take my food at 12 Noon. At that time, I used to give him also a share. He also used to do some petty jobs like fetching water from the Ganga, cleaning the vessels etc. His father's name was Murti Ram and his own name was Sivanand. Along with him, his paternal uncle's son Mukund also used to come. This boy Mukund was very

intelligent. I began to teach them all subjects. While I used to teach all subjects in a general way, I used to concentrate on the teaching of language and arithmetic.

318. Lalaji, the occupant of the Main Guha, left for his place, Sahranpur. At that time I moved into the Main Guha and started living there. The main Guha had no door or other fittings. Through the open entry, snakes could enter the cave at will. It was very convenient for me to sit down and meditate in the inner portion of the Guha. While in meditation thus one day, when I opened my eyes by chance, I saw a large snake crawling towards my seat. My seat was a bit elevated from the ground. As soon as I saw the snake, I closed my eyes again in meditation without any fear. Thereafter, where did the snake go? I have not seen it again.

319. To sit down on the bank of the Ganga and meditate in silence during summer is a very pleasant experience. Sometimes guests would come. By the time Sadhus reach here from Rishikesh, they would be very tired. They would stay for at least 2-3 days.

320. How is daily life carried on? The answer is - The Lord looks after it. If the Kali Kambilwala dharmashala people are requested, they would send provisions every month. But I had decided that I would not go there for bhiksha.

321. This decision was not without a reason. While staying in Brahmapuri, once on a New Moon day I went there as usual for bhiksha. It is the attendants

there who give the bhiksha. When one sees their attitude and behaviour, one will not be inclined to ask for or accept anything from them. I went near them and kept standing. Who is there to take notice of me? I told the attendants: "Please give me bhiksha if you feel like it. I am in a hurry to leave". They did not like it. Saying in a sarcastic manner "Hey, have you come on horse-back? Let the horse keep standing there", they gave me bhiksha. I then decided: "Oh, God, please do not take me to such mean-minded persons for bhiksha". From that day I began to lead an independent life. It is far better to beg from one's friends who are sympathetic towards one, than from such people.

322. I did not have many friends or acquaintances at that time in that area. An advocate in Sitapur used to take a special interest in me. Once during my stay in Svargaashram, while I was staying in Swami Sivananda's hut, that advocate happened to come there and Swamiji had introduced him to me. He used to show special interest in me too.

323. His name was Pandit Shri Chandnarainji. It was only later that I came to know fully his qualities and nature. He is a first-rate leading lawyer in Sitapur. He is a Kashmiri Brahmin. He used to like, and was interested in, Sadhus. It was service to Sadhus which he considered most important in life. He has provided countless number of Sadhus with money, clothes and bhiksha. His right hand did not know what his left hand did — so closely guarded were his charity and philanthropy. His life in this world as a house-holder

was like that of a lotus leaf on water. While he lived right in the midst of his daily life as a house-holder, none of its problems came anywhere near him or affected him. He had a special affection for me and has taken me to his residence in Sitapur several times. Once while in Brahmapuri, I had happened to request him for some money. He had sent me the money immediately and also written to me that whenever I needed money in the future, I should let him know. I do not think I have troubled him or others since then frequently for money. "*Yogakshemam vahaamyaham*". I began to acquire total faith in this dictum. And thus daily livelihood was looked after by Him.

324. I stayed here in Vasishtha Guha for all of an year. During that period I used to go to the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram in Kankhal to participate in the birth anniversary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

325. I think it was in 1930 that I started feeling a desire to go to Kashmir on pilgrimage. I reached Sitapur. From there, via Rawalpindi to Srinagar. Kashmir is considered equivalent to heaven. I do not know anybody in Kashmir. Is not God omni-present? I stayed for some days in Narayana Math. I learnt about the important places in Kashmir. Then I started seeing them one by one. The beauty of the gardens is something special. There are houseboats in the rivers in which one can live. Life in them is very comfortable indeed. One gentleman took me to the house-boats and gave me an opportunity of staying in one of them. The boat-man rows the boat here and there. The rich can really enjoy. From April-May to October-November, I stayed at many places there. In places like Mattom, Anantnag, Pahalgam etc, Hindus are very few in number. Muslims account for 90% of the population there. One could see Hindus and Muslims staying in the same house. The Muslims do not have any streak of cruelty or hard-heartedness in them. The servants and attendants of the Pandits are Muslims. It was the Muslims who were the agriculturists, servants, washermen, barbers, cowherds — in fact all the items of work for the Hindus were performed by Muslims. As a matter of fact, it is impossible for Hindus to live in Kashmir without the Muslims. It is the Muslims who bring water to the Hindu kitchens. And, again, it is they who carry the dead bodies when death takes place in a Hindu house.

326. At one time most of the Hindu-converted-Muslims had a keen desire to come back to Hinduism. But because of their false ego, the Pandits did not agree to it. It is the consequence of this that the descendants of these Hindus and Muslims are now experiencing.

327. The Kashmiri Pandits are very generous. They have great respect for learned Sadhus. It gave them great pleasure to keep me in their houses.

328. I did not stay in houses for long. Pahalgam is an elevated place. Travellers pitch tents and stay in groups there. I also pitched a small tent and stayed in it for some days.

329. The principal place to see here is the cave in Amarnath. House-holders and Sadhus keep on coming in large numbers to have a darshan of this cave. The principal day for darshan is the Full Moon day in Sravana (August - September). Darshan is possible and can be obtained even in Aashaadh (July-August). During these days, when the ice melts, idols of Siva and Parvati get formed here on their own from the melting ice — so legend has it. It takes about a week to reach there from Srinagar.

330. From Srinagar, a lot of pilgrims join together and travel in a group to Amarnath. They get some little help from the Maharaja. After resting at several places on the way, they eventually reach Amarnath. When one takes bath in the Pancharini river, and then reaches the cave, one experiences bliss and forgets all problems

and worries. In those days there were no secure places for resting on the way. Sometimes there used to be snow falls which used to cause a lot of hardship and damage to the pilgrims. Nowadays, dharmashalas have sprung up at several points on the way and pilgrims are able to reach Amarnath in fair comfort and safety.

331. It was in the month of Aashadh (July-August) that I had darshan of Amarnath. A gentleman took me there. I had a tent all for myself. After a very satisfying darshan of Amarnath, one fine morning I returned to Srinagar.

332. Severe cold sets in in Kashmir in November-December, but before that, I left Kashmir. After spending a few days in Lahore, I reached Rishikesh, and from there I returned to Vasishtha Guha.

333. I had been away from the Guha for about 6-7 months. Thinking that I had left for good, some Sadhus had occupied it and were staying there. I came to know about this when I reached Rishikesh. They did not really wish to leave the Guha. So, one evening I reached the Guha. Along with me was a student from Sitapur, by name Abhimanyu. When I arrived, there were 3 or 4 sturdy Sanyasis there. They were staying there with the firm resolve that, come what way, they would not go away from there. Without caring in the least for their attitude, I entered the cave, as usual, with a sense of full liberty. I deposited all my things inside the cave and came and sat outside. They did not say or do anything against my doings.

334. They stayed with me for 2 or 3 days and then left. At the time of their departure, I also gave them ten rupees.

335. As usual, Siva and Mukund used to come daily for studies. I have already mentioned that there were very few literates here. By now these boys had picked up the skill to read and write fairly well and to do sums. When they saw the progress made by the boys, the other villagers too experienced a desire to get their boys also taught to read and write. They approached me. Where do I find the time to teach all these boys? Anyway, some more boys started joining the class. I had occasion to leave the Guha for the second time for going somewhere for a long time. At that time a

Brahmachari came and occupied it. On return I stayed in the adjoining cavelet. Then I went and stayed in Bhingni — the present - day Anand Kashi. I happened to stay there for 2 years in a hut made of grass. 6 or 7 children too used to come daily for studies. It was extremely difficult to stay there in the cold season. At that time, when I used to move into the cave in Brahmapuri where I was formerly staying, these children also used to accompany me.

336. Once when I went to Kankhal to participate in the Anniversary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna, these children also came with me. All the people there used to take delight in meeting these children of the forest. The children had learnt by heart several portions from Tulsidas Ramayana. They happened to sing some portions of it at an assembly. Suffice it to say that every one was pleasantly surprised at their skill.

337. It must be 1932 A.D. now. There was no way of reaching this hilly place from Rishikesh. All this region was under the control of the Maharaja of Tehri. This place falls within the territory of the Kingdom of "Tehri-Garhwal". The king's Minister at that time was one Pandit Chakra Dhar. He was a very brave and courageous person. Under his persuasion, the Maharaja set about getting a motorable road constructed from Rishikesh to Kirtinagar. For any road construction project the very first task is to survey the alignment. The king's officers had made the survey in such a way that the road would pass through the nearby Lorsi village, about 3 miles (5 km) away. According to this

survey it would become necessary to dismantle and remove all the houses in that village. The villagers represented their grievances to me. When I went to Rishikesh once, I apprised Babu Ganga Prasad, High Court Judge, who happened to come there, of this matter. He advised me to discuss this directly with Dewan Pandi Chakra Dhar who was expected to come to that village shortly.

338. A dark night. I am seated in the innermost recess of the cave, immersed in thinking about God. It must be around 9 P.M. An Overseer known to me comes hurriedly inside the cave and tells me that the Dewan Sahib and his entourage have arrived. I sent him back, requesting him to see that they remain wherever they were. It was indeed a peculiar scene when I came outside the cave in a few moments. The Dewan Sahib and his entourage are seated there. The moment they saw me, all of them get up, salute me and tell me: "Swamiji, we have all reached your door-step. It would be a great help if we could be permitted to rest somewhere here". Telling them that they could rest here itself comfortably, I took the Dewan Sahib and the Chief Engineer inside the cave and made them sit there. I gathered from their conversation that they had no eatables with them. They have come here, very tired, after facing various hardships on the way. Nobody who has visited me in the cave after I started living there, has ever had occasion to go back without food. By the grace of God, I had with me 2 tinfuls of wheat flour and other materials. I had also with me a large quantity of tapioca roots which had been cultivated by a Sadhu,

Krishnananda, of Svargaashram, which he had very kindly sent me — and which is available in plenty in Kerala. I entrusted all these materials to the attendants of the Dewan Sahib, and, within no time they prepared chapatis, dal and curries. Everyone was satisfied. They praised the tapioca curry wherever they went.

339. The Dewan Sahib and the Chief-Engineer slept inside the cave itself. The Dewan Sahib spoke formal words to the effect that he was highly indebted to me. "We are going to get a large Ashram constructed for Swamiji. If a suitable site for it is shown to the Chief Engineer tomorrow morning, we can take further steps". So spoke the Dewan Sahib to me. Although I had no desire at all for large buildings and felt that this cave was quite sufficient, I told the Dewan "yes, yes". Early next morning itself, he sent the Engineer and an assistant with me for selection of a site. We proceeded as far as Bhingini, settled on the place where I was staying earlier and returned to the cave.

340. The Engineer had a special respect and affection for me. On the way he happened to remark to me, "Swamiji, this Dewan is a very tricky person. All this is a scheme to get hold of the cave from you". I too had understood everything. When the Dewan asked me whether a site had been selected, I replied "All that can be considered later". Thereafter the Dewan left with his entourage to Lorsi village to look into the villagers' grievances.

341. On the night in which they had arrived at the

cave, they had asked me about construction of the road; and I had explained the facts to the Dewan. If the road were to be laid through the village, the villagers would be subjected to great hardship and loss. I particularly stressed on him that their condition would be the same as if they were to be cast into the sea.

342. The Dewan inspected the village and consoled the people. On the third day morning he reached the cave, carried in a "doli" by attendants, there being no one else with him other than those who carried the "doli". I went near him and started talking to him. He told me, "If you like that place, I shall straightaway issue orders for constructing a good building". Telling him "Let us go inside the cave and talk", I led him inside the cave and sat down. I tell him without the least trace of fear and with courage, "O, Dewan Sahib! What is your real intention? We are mendicants and can stay happily anywhere. If you desire to have this cave, please tell the truth. I am prepared to leave the cave this very moment". Hearing these strong words of mine, he immediately fell at my feet, "Hey, Hey, Hey. How can I get such a thought? Strange! How strange!". Mumbling thus, he set off for Narendra Nagar.

343. Whatever it be, Chakra Dhar decided that he would not have the road taken through Lorsi. Pandit Kalanand who was then Overseer, was appointed to survey an alignment for the road along the bank of the Ganga. There was also a contractor Jit Hund to assist him. Today pilgrims traverse this road in large numbers on

their way to Badri Narayana, enjoying the bliss of watching Mother Ganga flowing by the roadside.

344. With the arrival of the motorable road, the Guha(cave) and its neighbouring regions, which were practically unknown, now became quite well-known. Now when pilgrims hear the name "Vasishtha Guha" they experience a desire to see the place. By 1933, the road had come up to the top of the Guha. One afternoon at 2 P.M. the Maharaja of Tehri and his retinue reached the Guha. He got acquainted with me in conversation. Later also he happened to come here several times, accompanied by his Rani. This year, a gentleman from Kanpur also came. He pitched a tent and stayed here for a day or two. While leaving, he offered some money too.

345. Now I developed a desire to go to Badrinath. It is only now that my long-standing determination of going to Badri and staying there for several days, doing Bhajanam worship, is about to be fulfilled. Siva and Mukund are engaged in the grocery trade. I gave them some monetary help for this.

346. I started for Badri Narayana one evening taking Mukund also with me. I had some money also with me. If one goes to Badrinath without adequate clothes, one would suffer in the cold. It is for staying in that sacred place at least for some months that I was going there. From the Guha, we went on foot. That night we rested in Malakund. The next day we reached this side of Mounichatti. There was a temporary floating bridge to

cross the river to the otherside. Crossing that bridge and passing through Vyasa Chatti, Devaprayag, and Srinagar, we reached Rudra Prayag. By that time Mukund developed fever. He could not also carry the bundles. I used to help him on the way in carrying the load. Several times I felt it was a big mistake having brought Mukund along. We stayed in the dharmashala at Rudra Prayag for a day or two. He was given medicines. When he got well, we resumed the journey to Badrinath. We also took along a coolie to carry the bundles, I need hardly say that it was the pilgrimage season then. Pilgrims go direct from Rudra Prayag to Kedar Nath. As I had already performed darshan of Kedar Maheshwar, I left out that place from my present itinerary. My sole thought was somehow to reach Badrinath.

347. From Rudra Prayag, after crossing Karna Prayag, Nanda Prayag, Chemmali, Lalsanga, Pippalkothi, Joshimath, Vishnu Prayag, Pandukeshwar, Hanumanchatti etc, one evening we reached Badrinathpuri for the second time. Keeping our things temporarily at a Panda's house, taking bath and doing darshan of the deity and after making some rice and dal (Khichdi) and consuming it, we rested for the night.

348. The next day I started looking for a place for my regular stay. Thinking of staying in one of the solitary huts on the other bank of the Alaknanda, I proceeded there. There I met an acquaintance of mine — Swami Paramananda. With his help I started staying in a

nearby hut. I sent back Mukund to his place with an escort. I became free.

349. I would take bath in the morning in Tapta Kund and do darshan of the Lord in the temple. As is known, the priest who performs poojas inside the temple is a Malayali Brahmin (Namboodiri). Seated outside the Sanctum Sanctorum, Pandits will read out in a loud voice regularly the Purushasukta, Gita, Sahasranama, upanishads etc. I too used to join them in reading these texts.

350. One used to get bhiksha daily from the dharmashala of Kali Kambliwala. I would keep a portion of that for the evening. With days passing on happily like this, I developed fever and cough. The hospital is close by. I went there and began taking medicines, but there was no improvement. One night I saw a Vaidya in a dream. I dreamt that somebody was telling me that this vaidya's treatment would cure me. The same vaidya turned up outside my hut the next day. Recognising him I apprised him of my condition. When I began taking his medicines, I got well. It is worth mentioning that Sri Paramananda Swamiji rendered me all assistance by tending me during my illness.

351. Now Guru Purnima is approaching. The Full Moon day in the month of Aashadh is called Guru Purnima. On this day is worshiped Vyasadeva, the first Preceptor of mankind, by performing pujas to him. In accordance with this, disciples also perform puja to their preceptors on this day. As Adi Sankara has installed the deity in

Badrinath, the Rawal Saheb who performs pujas in this temple adopts him — Adi Sankara — as Preceptor and offers puja on this day to the Dasannami Sanyasis who are Adi Sankara's followers. As it is not possible to do puja to all the Sanyasis three or four noble Sanyasis are selected and pujas are done to them. On that day, I too was invited for puja being done.

352. The Rawal Saheb himself comes out from the Sanctum Sanctorum to the Puja place. After washing the feet of the Sanyasis considered worthy of Puja on that day, they are respectfully and with devotion worshipped by offering Arghya, Paadya etc. All the expenses of these Sanyasis for a period of 4 months from that day are also met. From that day, the Rawal Saheb treats them as Preceptors. I too did not have to go to the dharmashala for bhiksha.

353. I stayed on in Badrinathapuri till the Malayalam month of Chingam (August-September), enjoying the bliss of the God's darshan. Janmashtami is also approaching. There are special pujas and other rites in the temple on that day. I witnessed and participated in all those. Soon thereafter, taking a coolie with me to carry my belongings, I set off for Vasishta Guha. There is a place known as "Aadi Badri", a little away from Hanuman chatti. There too pujas were being conducted by people from Kerala. I stayed there for about a week and then reached Lal Sanga. From there, wending my way over the mountain path along with my coolie, I reached a village around noon. Unbearable hunger and thirst. I prayed to the villagers for some food or for

something to drink at least. I had some money with me. I emptied my money-bag before them and told them: "Please take as much money as you want and give me something to eat and drink". They remained unmoved, unmindful of my repeated entreaties. They did not give me even a little watery butter-milk to drink. When I started threatening one of them with the stick in my hand, all at once several of the villagers, from all sides, started bringing me all kinds of eatables. They heaped large quantities of milk, curd, fruits etc in front of me like a hillock. All I wanted was a small quantity of milk or curd. I offered the price for whatever I consumed, but despite my insistence, they did not accept any money. Resting there for some time, I resumed my journey with the coolie, and by evening I reached the Lorsi village. That night I spent in that village itself. It is here that Siva and Mukund were staying. The next day we started at dawn itself and reached the Guha — Total Peace! (Saantam Prasaantam).

CHAPTER - 17

354. "Guroh anghripadme manasched na lagnam
tatah kim, tatah kim, tatah kim, tatah kim?"

*Let one have all sorts of greatness and magnificence.
All this becomes trifling if he does not have devotion to
the Lotus Feet of the Preceptor.*

355. I had always a profound conviction that it was only the Preceptor's benign compassion that enables one to achieve effortlessly even the most impossible-looking things. I would like to reiterate again and again that it was Shri Tulsi Maharaj (Swami Nirmalanandaji) who had tried incessantly and made a man out of me. Although this body has been away from the Guruji for quite some time now, my mind is ever and anon close to the Swamiji himself and not at all far from him. Not that, off and on, I did not experience a desire to have his darshan with my physical eyes. My love for my native land has also been attracting me there several times. But whatever be my thoughts or emotions, all of them disappear or become submerged the moment I step into the Guha. Letters from some dear friends also had the effect of attracting me there. Shri Vaageeswarananda Swami who was residing in the Ashram at Tiruvalla also used to send letters. I also got a letter from him, saying; "If you do not come down here, we will all be starting for the Guha". My heart had not become all that hard to withstand this expression of genuine affection. Whenever I used to receive such affectionate letters, I used to make up my

mind firmly that I would visit my native place. At the same time, I did not have the courage to give up my stay in the Guha. However, I wrote a reply and posted it to Tiruvalla. I had given in that letter details of my intended date of departure from the Guha etc. After posting it, I experienced remorse but at the same time I did not wish to nullify that letter. Ultimately I decided to start from the Guha.

356. From the Guha to Rishikesh; from there to Delhi; then to Sitapur. From there, on to Brindavan. After staying in Brindavan happily for a month or so, I proceeded to Kanpur. From Kanpur I reached Calcutta and the Belur Math happily.

357. It was the Maha Purusha Maharaj that had given Sanyasa Deeksha to this humble soul in this very Belur Math. He has since abandoned his body. The present administrative head was Sudhir Maharaj. He too had a special affection for me. After staying in Belur Math for 3-4 days, I reached the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram in Puri. From the Ashram to Jagannath. For some days I stayed in Jagannath enjoying the bliss of the God's darshan. From there I reached the Ashram at Madras. I had not so far intimated Shri Nirmalananda Swamiji about my travels. It was in Bangalore that the Swamiji had been staying permanently. But for some reason, he had given up his residence in the Bangalore Ashram and he was now staying in an Ashram at Ottappalam in Kerala which had been constructed under his persuasion. I had come to know about this. In fact my main object in undertaking this travel itself was to

have darshan of that sacred person. I sent a letter to Swamiji from Madras. The then President of the Madras Ashram was Swami Saswatanandaji. My stay in Madras too was very happy.

358. I entrain from Madras. I reached the Ottappalam railway station around 8 a.m one morning. I reached the Ottappalam Ashram, armed with some gifts, around 9 A.M. Swamiji was busily engaged in some activity in the garden. I saw Swamiji even from some distance. Approaching Swamiji slowly, I fell at his feet. Taking me with him, Swamiji went and sat down in the enclosed verandah of the Ashram. He asked me about all my details. "Had you let me know the time of your arrival at the railway station, I would have sent somebody to fetch you". These and other similar affectionate statements of the Swamiji gladdened my heart. Under Swamiji's instructions, I went and had tea and other things. It is now the Malayalam month of Chingam (August-September). It is still raining and the muddy water in the Bharathapuzha river is eddying along in full flood. The administrative head of the Ashram was Shri Sukhananda Swamiji. I entrusted to him all the gifts I had brought. After a short rest I went to Bharathappuzha and had my bath and washed my clothes. Sri Ramananda Swamiji who was also staying in the Ashram, also came with me to the river. Brahmachari Damodaran, Sreekantananda Swamiji, Muraharananda Swamiji, Amalananda Swamiji and others were also staying there. After the mid-day meal, I rested. I too became engaged in various items of work in the Ashram.

359. By the time I had written this much, a fierce doubt assailed me about what I should write about hereafter; so I stopped writing at this stage. Six or seven months passed like this. "*Satyam brooyaat, Priyam brooyaat, Satyamapyapriyam na brooyaat.*" — "One must speak only the truth, but it must be pleasing to the person to whom it is addressed. Even if it were to be the Absolute truth, if it would be unpleasant for the person for whom it is intended, it is preferable not to speak the truth, but maintain silence." — a most appropriate counsel indeed.

360. Some worthy persons happened to go very carefully through the manuscript copy written by this humble soul. I begin to resume the writing of my autobiography on this auspicious Ashtami Rohini day under the repeated persuasion and loving insistence of these great souls.

361. In deference to Swamiji's wishes, I stayed for a few days in the Ottappalam Ashram itself, doing what work I can. I have already stated that Swamiji had been staying permanently in the Ashram at Bangalore and that this humble soul too had been fortunate to be with the Swamiji in that Ashram for quite some time. One should particularly mention here that it was the culmination of the Swamiji's selfless, ceaseless and untiring work that the Bangalore Ashram, which to begin with was a mere rocky stretch of land, eventually became an ideal Ashram with enchanting flower

gardens, mango groves, cow sheds etc. But for certain unknown reasons, the Swamiji put an end to his stay in the Bangalore Ashram and shifted to the Ashram in Thiruvananthapuram. Later, Swamiji began staying in the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram in Sri Ramakrishna Nagar in Ottappalam.

362. There are several Brahmin families staying around the Ottappalam Ashram. The Brahmin society had unfairly "exiled" or boycotted them. On account of this, they had been leading a very miserable existence. *En masse* they sought refuge at Swamiji's feet. Swamiji started devoting his attention to uplifting them.

363. Is it not in the young boys and girls that the entire future and welfare lies, whether of society or of a nation? Swamiji used to exert himself to the utmost for the true and real welfare of these Brahmin boys and girls. He used to educate and instruct them in physical training, acquisition of knowledge, meditation and bhajanas etc in order to foster the flowering of their physical, mental and spiritual growth. The profound, majestic and stern Swamiji would bring himself down to the level of those children just as a boy of their age group would.

364. Even here the Swamiji used to do hard physical work daily for 2-3 hours. The Swamiji's disciples who were staying in the Ashram could not also refrain from doing good work. I too used to go near Swamiji and participate in the physical labour occasionally. But when I stood in that raw earth for some time without foot-

wear, my feet would start aching. Swamiji was not aware of this at first. Later, Swamiji himself had occasion to remark: "Bhakta wants some other work, some literary work".

365. *"Jananee Janma bhoomischa Swargaadapi gareeyasee"*. My desire to visit my birth place intensified. I apprised Swamiji of this. And, with his blessings, one day I started for Tiruvalla. After reaching Ernakulam and staying 2-3 days in the Poor Home there, I reached Alappuzha.

366. This Poor Home was established by the Maharaja of Cochin(Kochi). Men and women who had no visible means of support or people to care for them, stay here day and night. They are provided with free food and clothes in addition to shelter. The Government of Cochin had entrusted the management of this establishment to Shri Ramakrishna Ashram. There were some Swamiji's (of the Sri Ramakrishna Order) there, in charge of administration of this Poor Home. There too, we moved in a spirit of friendliness.

367. There is a Sri Ramakrishna Ashram in Alappuzha also. I stayed there for 2-3 days. This place had been gifted to Swamiji as Guru Dakshina by the famous lawyer, Shri P.G. Govinda Pillai. There are several persons here who are Swamiji's disciples. Lawyer Shri Krishna Pillai was one of these important disciples. Another Shri Govinda Pillai, a person of very sharp intellect and deeply interested in me, was at that time a clerk in the District Court in Alappuzha. These persons

took me to the famous Sri Krishna temple at Ambalapuzha(about 11 miles or 18 km from Alappuzha - Tr.). Ashtami Rohini was also approaching. The "Paal Paayasam"(Sweetened boiled rice, milk and sugar — Kheer — Tr.) is famous all over Kerala. Imbibing lots of the "Paayasam" and having darshan of Lord Krishna, I stayed there till Ashtami Rohini.

368. The next day I started for Tiruvalla by country boat. On the way I got down at Ramankara. I reached the residence of Naarakathara Thumbayil Kurup. This is the Poorva Ashrama place of Swami Sukhanandaji. I met his aged mother. After accepting the hospitality of some friends there, I left for Changanassery by country boat and reached there by 3 P.M. one day. From there I reached the vicinity of the new Ashram in Tiruvalla by bus. From there, after walking for a minute or two, I reached the Ashram.

*"Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare;
Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare"*

369. When I reached the Ashram only Sri Vageeswarananda Swamiji and one Brahmachari were there. It was 5 P.M. when I reached there. The moment I stepped into the Ashram, Vageeswarananda Swamiji felt extremely happy and treated me with considerable affection and regard. I offered to him also the prasada from the Sri Krishna Temple at Ambalapuzha which I had carried with me — small sweet cakes (Unniappam) and “Paal Payasam”. After conveying to him briefly all my experiences, I had my bath, meditation and prayer. I also participated in the evening pooja and deepa-aaraadhana (Aarati) and had my night meal. And, after mentally remembering Sri Ramakrishna, I embraced the Goddess of sleep ardently.

370. Let me say a few words here about this Ashram. As I have already mentioned. I had been staying in the Ashram at Tiruvalla ever since it had been constructed. In those days Shri Swamiji too used to visit the Ashram regularly every year. As that place was very small, I used to give a lot of thought to the inconvenience experienced by Swamiji in staying there. I had been trying to have a suitable and convenient building constructed in spacious premises. By God's grace, the site where the present Ashram is located, was gifted, together with a registered title deed, by its owner, Shri Veliath Kurup, to the Ashram. I made Swamiji also inspect this site. Elevated ground; closeness to the river; a public road running quite close; a lonely, solitary

place — all in one, the fittest place for an Ashram. Swamiji was delighted.

371. The idea was deep-rooted in me that, somehow or the other, a good and convenient building should be got constructed there. But I could not take any concrete step to give shape to my wish as, very soon thereafter, I had to leave Tiruvalla for the Quilandy Ashram. Suffice it to say that, somehow, a good Ashram building got constructed there. It was all due to Swamiji's blessings. I came to understand later on that the construction proceeded apace because of the keen enthusiasm and interest of Vageeswarananda Swamiji and Nirvikarananda Swamiji. The next day I rested in the Ashram itself. Several persons known to me came to the Ashram. First I went to the Tiruvalla temple and had darshan of Sri Vallabha. There I prostrated before the banyan tree to which I had been most attached. Sitting on the cement platform under that tree and enjoying the bliss of singing Kirtans, I later returned to the Ashram at night with Vageeswarananda Swamiji and rested.

372. The next day I visited my birth place (household). I walked all over the neighbouring areas and accepted the hospitality of some eminent persons. Like this I spent 3 or 4 days in the Ashram at Tiruvalla.

373. In Pullaat, there are some persons interested in me. The most important among them is Vaidyan Narayana Panikkar. Once he came in a car with his family and took me to Pullat; Vageeswarananda Swamiji

was also with me. We stayed there for 2-3 days. One evening we went to the temple at Aaranmula (Sri Krishna temple - Tr) and had darshan. As desired by Vageeswarananda Swamiji, we then started from there for Chengannur. We stayed there in a lovely building on the river bank, for 2-3 days. From there, back to Tiruvalla; from there to Chengannur, along with Vageeswarananda Swamiji. From there, I left alone for Haripad.

374. Is not the Ashram at Haripaad a place which I liked most? That Ashram has also been sanctified by the touch of Shri Maharaj's lotus feet. Was it not there that I was given Mantra Deeksha by that Great One? Chellappa Swami — Chitsukhananda Swamiji — and Chitprabhananda Swamiji were all eagerly awaiting my arrival. After staying there for 3-4 days happily I went to the Ashrams at Muttam and Kayamkulam. Chitsukhananda Swamiji was also with me. From Kayamkulam we reached Adoor. Shri Sankaravelil Parameswaran Pillai was Munsiff there. In Adoor too there is a Ramakrishna Ashram but I stayed at Pillai's residence itself. From there we went to Kollam, Sasthamkotta and other places. At last, one evening I reached the office of the "Prabudha Keralam" in Tiruvananthapuram. Niranjanananda Swamiji and others were staying there then. After I had stayed there for a day or two, Dr. Tampi took me to the Vattiyoorkavu Ashram (in Tiruvananthapuram). There too some Swamiji's were staying. The then administrative head there was Swami Nirvikaranandaji. Shri Padmanabhan Tampi, who had been Superintendent of Police had

taken Sanyasa from our Swamiji (Nirmalananda) and he was also staying there. Sri Ojasananda Swamiji, Sri Sachidananda Swamiji and Sri Amalananda Swamiji too were there. I stayed there only for a day or two. My stay there too was a source of delight - was it not the President Maharaj who had laid the foundation stone for this Ashram too? On that occasion, I was quite near the Maharaj when he instructed me: "Look, Bhakta! what an enchanting place this is. When the Ashram own building gets completed, you must take some youngsters and train them as Brahmacharis and make them stay here". I shall remember those words always.

375. Later Dr. Tampi took me to his residence. After spending a day or two there, I left alone for Kanyakumari. Shri. Nirvikarananda Swamiji and Shri Chitprabhananda Swamiji too accompanied me. After darshan at Suchindram and Nagerkovil, we reached Kanyakumari. We took accommodation in the Government Chowltry (Satram) itself. In many respects Kanyakumari was for me an important tirtha centre. We spent 4 or 5 days there, enjoying the divine darshan of the Goddess. The help rendered by Sri Karayalar, the licensee for the salt pans, is worth mentioning here.

376. A personage I liked most — Shri Ambananda Swamiji — too happened to come here. After spending some time in the house of his brother, Sri Gopala Pillai, I returned to Thiruvananthapuram.

377. My intention had been to return to North India from Kanyakumari itself via Madurai. I had written

accordingly to Swamiji too at Ottappalam. His orders were, however, that I should return to Ottappalam itself. So, I had eventually to return by the same route I had taken on the forward journey.

378. The place I like most is Gurupavanapuram (Guruvayoor). So I proceeded there direct. After doing bhajanam worship for a few days, I left for Ottappalam. Shri Kunjirama Pathiyar was a gentleman very dear to me. He was then staying at Pattambi. I arrived at Pattambi and stayed there also for a day or two. Leaving Pattambi, I reached Swamiji's presence just before noon one day. Swamiji was taking his bhiksha then. I went before him, prostrated and sat near him. Swamiji was very happy. Swamiji offered me a portion of his food in the same plate off which he was eating. I enjoyed that like nectar.

379. Swamiji obtained from me all the details of my South Indian sojourn, and I stayed with Swamiji for some days. I happened to go to the Ashram at Quilandy too. Then, along with Swamiji, I reached Sri Krishnan Nair's residence. He was then the District and Sessions Judge. He was a great devotee of Swamiji's. Sekharananda Swamiji was then staying in the Ashram at Kozhikode. After going there also, I again returned to the Ottappalam Ashram.

380. I spent some more days in service to Swamiji's lotus feet. One day Swamiji told me, "You do one thing. Read out the Bhagavatham to the devotees who come here". I accepted this. Just then I remembered Shri

Kundu Panickar. He had desired that I should read out from the Bhagavatham for some days in his house. When I mentioned about this to Swamiji he agreed that I might do so. Shri Panickar was then staying in a new building in Cheruppullasserri. His aged mother too was with him. All his family members were known to me.

381. I reached Cheruppullasserri. It is a good place. There is a Sastha (Ayyappa) temple there. A special divinity could be experienced there. I used to visit that temple occasionally, along with Shri Panickar and do worship. For some days I read out portions from the Bhagavatham to them. Then once again, myself, accompanied by Shri Panickar, his wife and children, in his own car, arrived at Ottappalam in Swamiji's presence. After Swamiji's darshan and taking some rest Shri Panickar and family returned to their homestead. Panickar began to contribute a small sum of money every month — three rupees or so, I think — to the Ashram. He continued to do so for quite some time.

382. My desire to return to Uttarkhand intensifies. But Swamiji is not inclined to let me go.

383. *"Vajraadapi Katthoraani Mrdooni Kusumaadapi"*
— Swamiji's heart was at once harder than diamond and softer than a flower. Whenever he observes any defect or lapse on anybody's part, he would use the first available opportunity of berating him harshly. Swamiji has even slapped me several times. On several occasions I have witnessed Swamiji working himself to the highest pitch of anger, but all at once becoming as tranquil-minded as an innocent child. In the Ottappalam Ashram, Swamiji was staying on the first floor. Once he was scolding not any outsider, but his own disciples. I happened to get a cold. Swamiji had eucalyptus oil with him. None could muster the courage to go to Swamiji when his anger had been aroused, like Sri Narasimha Moorthy. But my pressing need pushed me into Swamiji's presence. When I went before that inflamed personage and prostrated before him all his anger vanished and he became calm as a child. At once he got up, opened his box, took out the medicine bottle and cotton and gave them to me with affection. He totally forgot what had happened. Is this not the characteristic of great personages?

384. *"Durlabham trayamevaitat daivaanugraha hetukam
Manushyatvam, Mumukshutvam, Mahaapurushasamsrayah".*

One has obtained a human birth. Even to get that, instead of spending one's time like animals in eating, sleep, fear, reproduction etc, let there be an intense desire to go beyond the enjoyment of the material and

sensual pleasures. Even if one attains these two, the attainment of the ultimate goal is dependent entirely on the blessings of great persons without which nothing is ever possible. If one could serve such great ones with total sincerity, then there is nothing one cannot achieve. I too have behaved towards Swamiji without the least trace of insincerity. But to stay with Swamiji is in itself a terrible penance. Whenever there used to be a conflict in my mind and I used to suffer, I too used to leave the Swamiji and get away. I did not in the least desire ever to serve Swamiji even with a little bit of unwillingness. Here, in Ottappalam too, I stayed for some days carefully attending to the Swamiji's least wishes. One day Swamiji ordered: "You go to the Tiruvalla Ashram itself. You stay there, attending carefully to the affairs of the Ashram". I too agreed readily and willingly.

385. It is good to take birth in "God's house" (daivamandiram) but it is not proper to give up one's body there. This idea of Swami Vivekananda had taken deep roots in my mind.

386. There were several Ashrams in Travancore State. I have visited some of these Ashrams also. Some of the inmates of some Ashrams were carrying on without any regard, respect or devotion towards Swamiji. They had no sense of obedience to Swamiji either. I now began to understand these things a little. I realised only too well that Swamiji was sending me out into an agitated and turbulent situation. Come what may, I decided to carry out Swamiji's wishes as best as I could. I was to start for Tiruvalla, carrying a letter from

Swamiji. It was Swami Amalanandaji who wrote the letter as per Swamiji's directions. My entire strength lay in the Swamiji's sincere blessings and good wishes. The letter ran on these lines: "I am sending Purushottamananda to the Ashram and every one must obey him implicitly".

387. I have no liking for life in an Ashram. My entire idea in complying with Swamiji's directions was to proceed to Tiruvalla, acquaint my brother Sanyasis and Brahmacharis there of the situation, try to bring them round to the Swamiji's view point, restore order and harmony there and then, with Swamiji's permission, to return to North India. I left for Tiruvalla via Kottayam. When I reached Kottayam, I learnt that several of Swamiji's disciples had left for Tiruvalla. They must have heard about my arrival.

388. It was the Malayalam month of Kumbham. (February -March). I could not bear the heat. I reached the Tiruvalla Ashram by bus around 5 P.M. one evening. I deposited the bundle of my belongings there. At that time there was only one Brahmachari there. I entrusted to him the banana fruits that I had carried. Somebody drew adequate water for me from the well. I went to the well and had a good bath. My body got cooled somewhat with the cold water bath. After finishing darshan of the deity, I went and sat in a corner of the Ashram. The deeparadhana was also over; still none else was to be seen. Four or five disciples of Swamiji had assembled there. They too went away on some work and returned around 7.30 P.M. Everybody could

see me where I was sitting but all of them pretended not to see me and passed by me. One disciple came to me and made some enquiries somewhat affectionately.

389. It was time for the night meal. A boy came to me and invited me for food. Although I was feeling hungry, I did not wish to take food there. Nevertheless, I thought let me go and see. In any case, how can one refuse an invitation extended to a guest?. So I too went there. They were all eating. Something had been placed for me too in a corner. I sat down there and reluctantly consumed a little food. It was the culmination of the supreme and unbounded devotion they had for their Guru and Master that made me the object of all this humiliation.

390. Going back to the verandah of the Ashram, with considerable mental anguish, I tried to get some sleep. In the morning, after finishing my ablutions, I went to the well-side and had a good bath. There is no desire to remain in the Ashram even for a little while. I am extremely hungry. Going to a small shop near the Ashram, I bought and consumed some milk and fruits. I did not show Swamiji's sacred letter to anybody as yet. Nevertheless they have understood everything.

391. I spent some moments, not knowing quite what to do. Thinking that I will consult my friend from my boyhood days, Shri Sankaravelil Narayana Pillai and then decide upon the further course of action, I proceeded to the Paalakka Matham house where he was then staying. I apprised him of everything. After

taking bath in the crystal clear water in the pond in that house, I did my meditation and prayer, in peace and enjoyed a good meal and rested. His opinion and advice were that I should not leave the Ashram, but stay there regularly. At 3 P.M. in the afternoon I left his house for the Ashram. I told him that I would stay in the Ashram only if they permitted me and that I had no desire to get forcible access. He sent his son Ramakrishnan to accompany me. I have 2 or 3 tender coconuts also with me. When I reached the Ashram, only the Brahmachari was there. I rested there for some time. The inmates started returning. There were some others also with them.

392. I went to the Brahmachari and showed him the letter. I requested him to show the letter to the administrative heads. He declined to do so. I myself slowly approached the administrative head of the Ashram. He does not even look at me. "I have come here under Swamiji's orders. If you so desire, you may please read this letter": so saying, I offered to him the sacred letter given by Swamiji. It was with utter indifference that he took that letter and read it. He exhibited utter contempt as though asking - "Which Swamiji? What letter?" and threw away the sacred letter of the Gurudev. Saying "Hey, there is no need to throw it away like this. It is something very precious for me", I picked up that letter from the floor, placed it on my head reverentially and kept it safely.

393. Now what should I make or suspect, out of all this?. It is unthinkable for me to quarrel with brothers.

I tied up my bundle and prepared to go to the spot where I could get a bus. Ramakrishna Pillai was a great help. That evening I reached Adoor. The Munisiff there is Shri Parameswaran Pillai, a great devotee of Swamiji's. He was extremely happy to see me. I told him everything. After taking the night meal, I slept well. Hari Om.

394. What is to be done now? Is it not advisable to return to Vasishtha Guha without getting dragged into such squabbles? In any case I wrote a long letter giving a detailed account of everything and posted it to Swamiji. Shri Pillai was very happy. I stayed in his house for a day or two. While expecting Swamiji's reply, I went and stayed in Sasthaamkotta. It is a beautiful place. There is a Sastha(Ayyappa) temple here. (This is one of the few places where, in Travancore, there is a fresh water lake - Tr). All facilities needed for a life of quiet and solitude are available there. While staying like this, one evening Muraharananda Swamiji arrives in a car. What the Swamiji did when he got my letter was to send down Muraharanandaji at once to Adoor. And Shri Pillai sent him in his own car to Sasthanikotta. Swamiji acquainted me with all the developments. We returned to Adoor. Swamiji himself is preparing to come to Adoor. For that Swamiji's instructions were to proceed to Thiruvananthapuram, pick up Shri Nirvikaranandaji and reach Ottappalam as early as possible in Shri Pillai's car.

395. Now Swamiji's arrival is certain. Preparations are on for Swamiji's stay in Shri Pillai's house itself. I am finding the heat there unbearable. Near Shri Pillai's house itself there is a small woody place, and in its midst, a temple of the Goddess. I used to go and rest there. I spend the time eagerly expecting Swamiji's arrival. Now the car which went to fetch Swamiji comes back. But there is none else in the car other than the

driver. Shri Pillai had sent a hired car as his own car was undergoing repairs. Swamiji did not like this at all. If it were Shri Pillai's own car, Swamiji could use it as he liked. Swamiji did not like to undertake the long journey from Ottappalam in one stretch. What Swamiji had intended to do was to rest at various convenient places *en route* and do the journey at a leisurely pace. For this reason, he sent the hired car back at once. He had also sent a letter to the effect that Shri Parameswaran Pillai should send the car to Ottappalam after getting it repaired.

396. I was troubled. For so many days, giving up even sleep, I had been eagerly awaiting Swamiji's arrival. Shri Pillai's bungalow was close to the main road. Whenever the sound of an on-coming car was heard, I would run to the road, expecting Swamiji in that car. Now all that was left was disappointment. I had become tired, weak, and listless. How to get out of this place? And Shri Parameswaran Pillai does not permit me to leave for any place. Who knows God's will? A lawyer, who is keenly interested in me is staying in Kaanjirappally, which is only a few kilometres away. He had also spent a few months in the Tiruvalla Ashram, engaging himself in spiritual affairs with me. He has now invited me to Kanjirappally. Shri Pillai also agreed, and I reached that place.

397. I wrote and posted a letter to Swamiji on the following lines: "Seeing the present state of Ashrams in Travancore, I find it difficult to stay anywhere there. With Swamiji's kind permission, I am leaving for North

India, only to come again whenever Your Holiness wants me". (Guru Maharaj has himself reproduced the above extract from his letter in the English language, and also given below it a Malayalam Translation in somewhat more flowery and elaborate language but with no additional point. Hence the Malayalam passage has not been translated here - Tr.)

398. In Kanjirappally there were a few gentlemen known to me, such as the then Munsiff there. After staying there for 4 days, via Madura, I reached Madras. I did not intend to go this time to the Ashram at Madras. On the earlier occasion of my stay there, the President of the Madras Ashram had abused Swamiji. I did not wish to listen to the same type of abuse all over again. After staying comfortably in a doctor friend's house for 3 - 4 days, I entrained from Madras one evening. As I was just boarding the train, I saw the President of the Madras Ashram also in the station. We travelled together in relative cordiality. One gentleman was waiting at the Rajamundry station, expecting me. I got down there and accompanied that gentleman to his house.

399. He was an ardent devotee of Shri Ramakrishna. His name was Venkita Raju. He was a teacher. I stayed there for about 15 days. We celebrated the Sri Ramakrishna Centenary festival also there itself.

400. Here several gentlemen became well acquainted with me. One day I left for Hyderabad State by steam boat along the Godavari river. I had heard a good deal

about a very famous temple of Shri Rama on a hill top on the bank of the Godavari river in that State. Ramadasa was an official of the then Nawab. I had heard stories of how Ramadasa built a temple for Rama using Government moneys entrusted to him; how the Nawab had him thrown into prison for this offence; how God himself, taking human form, returned all the money to the Nawab and got Ramadasa released from prison etc.

401. Let me narrate that story here in brief:-

According to the Brahmanda Purana, there is a tall mountain called Bhadrachalam situated on the bank of the Godavari which, in ancient times was called the Gomati river. Now there is a beautiful temple there. The idols consecrated and installed in the Sanctum Sanctorum are those of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana. The story runs as follows: A very devoted lady by name Daamaakya experienced a dream in her sleep, revealing to her the place where the idols of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana were lying hidden, buried deep in the earth; directing her to have those idols dug up at once and installed properly in a temple at Bhadrachalam; that the idols should be worshipped and pujas offered to them with devotion until a great devotee by name Bhakta Ramadasa comes along there. That lady carried out all these instructions faithfully and was performing pujas to the idols.

402. Bhadrachalam was part of the then Mughal empire. The Administrator of that area, one Nawab Abdulla,

had two Hindu Ministers. Gopanna was the sister's husband of one of them. He was a great devotee of Sri Rama. He was appointed as the Tahsildar of Bhadrachalam. Because of his boundless devotion in Sri Rama, he had the temple at Bhadrachalam constructed very beautifully and the idols of Sri Rama, Sita and Lakshmana installed in it with great ceremony. He got the idols also decorated with costly pearl necklaces and garlands. Where did Ramadasa, viz, Gopanna, get the money for all this? What he had done was to take away 6 lakh gold mohurs from the treasury for this purpose. For this misconduct, the Nawab had Ramadasa imprisoned. He endured a lot of hardship in jail for 12 years. Even in prison Ramadasa continued to pray to his Ishta Devata (favourite deity). In the end he was making plans to get rid of his body and was awaiting a suitable opportunity to do so. Sita Devi then took pity on the true devotee and prayed to her husband regarding Ramadasa's release from prison. Rama and Lakshmana, taking the guise of two soldiers and carrying 6 lakh gold mohurs with them, appeared before the Nawab in his bed chamber at midnight. Seeing these two handsome youths, the Nawab was stunned. When questioned by the Nawab on the reason for their arrival at that unearthly hour, they answered that they had brought with them the 6 lakh gold mohurs appropriated by Ramadasa and requested that he be released from prison immediately. So saying they opened their money bags and showered all the 6 lakh gold coins on the floor. Completely overwhelmed by surprise, the Nawab accompanied the 2 youths then and there to the prison and set Ramadasa free. The youths

disappeared. When the Nawab got up the next morning, all this looked to him like a dream. He had not gone anywhere from the bed chamber. The 6 lakh gold coins were, however, still lying on the floor. The Nawab sees a special brightness in the room. The Nawab got Ramadasa there and acquainted him with all the details. Congratulating himself on his good fortune in having been able to see Rama and Lakshmana, the Nawab appointed Ramadasa himself, again as Tahsildar of Bhadrachalam. He also gave the 6 lakh gold mohurs to Ramadasa himself to be used as he thought fit

403. My desire to visit that holy place is now getting fulfilled. There were one or two Sadhus also with me. After having darshan of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana and staying there for one or two days, I started by rail again for North India. I rested for a few days in the residence of a gentleman at Kanpur who was known to me. From Kanpur I went to the Gita Press in Gorakhpur. They had invited me even earlier. At that time a non-stop japa (akhandajapa) of the divine mantra "Hare Rama Hare Rama, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna" day and night to the accompaniment of instrumental music was in progress. Devotees had congregated there from various places, prepared to stay there for the whole year for which the japa would be in progress. I too stayed there happily and participated, for 8-10 days. I took part also in the Sri Bhagavata Saptaham. A scholar used to read out the Bhagavata with great devotion. Suffice it to say that somehow I became the object of affection of everyone there.

404. From Gorakhpur I left for Lucknow. A gentleman by name Babu Ishwari Dayal, had visited me in Vasishtha Guha during his pilgrimage to Badrinath. My idea in going to Lucknow now was in deference to his wishes. I had also written to him in advance. He was therefore waiting for me at the station. I went with him to his house. His parents and brothers were extremely happy. I too participated in the Kirtans and other activities. I stayed in the Sri RamaKrishna Ashram also for a day or two and got to know many persons.

405. From Lucknow I reached Sitapur. Leading lawyers like Shri Santa Narain Harkoli and other principal citizens of Sitapur were eagerly awaiting my arrival. After resting there also for some days, I proceeded via Hardwar and Rishikesh and eventually reached the Guha.

406. Mere sight of Mother Ganga itself purifies the mind. But the greatness of a bath in the Ganga has to be simply experienced. "*Punaatu Bhagavatyaambaa Gangaa Dussanganaasinee Tanotu Bhaktim Vimalaam Nissreyasasukhaavahaam*". "O, Mother Ganga, who destroys bad company! After completely removing the mental impurities of this humble soul, please grant me that pure devotion which alone is the cause of supreme bliss" — this alone is my wish and entreaty.

407. The nature of my life here (in Vasishtha Guha) undergoes a change. Bath in the Ganga, life in the Guha, a life of solitude, beholding divinely scenic beauty, all these help considerably in affording peace and tranquillity to the mind. "*Guhaayaam Nihitam Tatvam*". The Supreme Truth is hidden in the Guha (the cave of the heart). Although this vedic utterance pertains to the cave of the heart, yet, external "mountain caves" are also of considerable help to saadhakas to realise and understand and experience this profound vedic statement. So far as I am concerned this is literally true. Just like a ship caught and tossed about in a fierce storm and about to capsize in the sea, consider the tragic state of a mind caught up and tossed in the raging storm of greed, lust, anger etc. Even in such terribly frightening situations, if you just enter inside a cave and consider yourself, all the undesirable emotions in the heart vanish just like darkness at sunrise. And one then feels compelled to continue remaining there for ever. One forgets the very existence of the

world outside. The mind experiences utter tranquillity. Right from the recesses of the heart emerges the sound "*Dhanyoham, Dhanyo-ham*" (O, fortunate indeed am I! I am indeed extremely blessed! - Tr). Right then I happen to remember Bhartrhari's beautiful sloka -

*"Dhanyoham girikandareshu vasataam
Jyotishpadam Dhyayataam Aanandaasrukanaan
Pibanti Sakunaa Nissankamankesayaah"*

The blessed ones remain seated in the mountain caves, meditating on that Supreme Jyoti (Effulgence) and experiencing Bliss Absolute. Sitting on their laps without the slightest trace of fear, birds taste the tears of joy shed by these fortunate ones. Learned readers should not misunderstand me here. I have not been able to attain this state or come anywhere near it. All I have been able to achieve is to guess a little bit of what such a blissful state could be!

408. "*Moksham Icchasi Chet taatavishāyaan Vishavattiyaja*" — "If you earnestly aspire for liberation, you must necessarily shun sensual pleasures as though they are poison and totally abandon them." All this solitary life is for the purpose of attaining complete and total detachment from the senses and the sense objects. It is also necessary to peruse good spiritual texts. What I am reading more and more these days is the "*Yoga vaasishtam*". I used to peruse through and make a survey of spiritual texts when I was staying in Uttar Kashi, particularly texts on Vedanta. With the increasing attention to Vedanta texts, my affinity for texts such as

the Bhagavatham started declining correspondingly to the point of total cessation. I gave away to somebody the copy of the Bhagavatam text that I had with me all these years. Now I spend the time in bath, meditation, Japa and reading of Vedanta texts. People keep coming and going; one or two persons used to stay with me in the Guha as though permanently.

"Saalyannam Saghrtam Payodadhiyutam yey Bhunjate maanavaah teshaam indriyanigraho yadi bhavet Vindhyah plavet saagare" (If one were to consume daily sweet rice, mixed with ghee and together with milk and curd too and still one could attain control of the senses, then surely the Vindhya mountains will plunge into the sea - Tr). Once when I had been in Sitapur, all I could get were milk and fruits. By consuming them, the stomach felt very light. If the truth were to be told, all the spiritual exercises such as meditation etc start with the stomach and remain there.

409. "*Aahaarasuddhau Satvasuddhih, Satva-Suddhau Sthiraamatih, matilabhye sarvagranthinaam vipramokshah*" (Chhandogyopanishad) - Bodily purity lies in the purity of the food one takes. In bodily purity lies steadiness of the mind and intellect. In such steadiness of the mind and the intellect, all the knots and bonds of attachment and bondage get torn asunder once and for all.

410. I have now adopted "*Ayaachakaritti*" (i.e. not requesting or begging anybody for anything in life, including food -Tr). "*Yogakshemam Vahaamyaham*". As

I had attained complete faith in this assurance of the Lord, I do not experience the need to ask others for anything. My personal expenditure is so little. But Brahmacharis, Sanyasis and householders (pilgrims and travellers) keep on coming and going and so the expenditure keeps on increasing. Everything is looked after by the Almighty.

CHAPTER - 23

411. It was in 1936 A.D. that I returned to the Guha after my Kerala sojourn. By then the road upto Kirti Nagar had been laid, which could carry buses. This new convenience induced me to go often to Badrinath. It had become possible for me to stay in Badri independently for as long as four months every time I went to Badri. I was acquainted with the then Maharaja of Tehri.

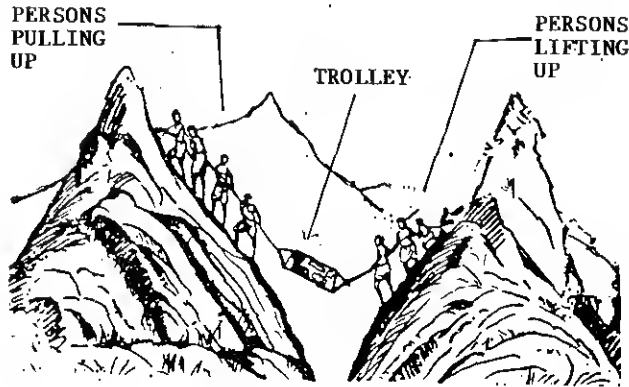
412. When desire, greed and lust rear their heads in the mind, the propensity to neutralise and destroy them is also the trait and characteristic of the mind. But I had understood and learnt from the Swamiji that a heart can really be considered to be extremely pure only if it does not at all give room for these emotions even to be generated in it. The object of my pilgrimages and spiritual sadhanas was to attain this state of mind. Although I have felt several times that I have been able to attain such a state, when I mix with worldly people, all this seems to get lost.

413. Brahma Shamsheer Jung Bahadur, the Crown Prince of Nepal once happened to come to Vasishtha Guha. He became a good friend of mine. The famous Pasupati Natha temple is in Nepal. Outsiders cannot enter Nepal without special permission. But on Sivaratri day anybody can visit the temple for darshan of Pasupatinath without let or hindrance. Several Sadhus and house-holders go there on that occasion. For the convenience of pilgrims, dharmashalas have been

established at various places. Food is also provided free to the poor.

414. I went from Lucknow up to Rexaul by train. There was nobody with me. I used to prefer travelling alone to travelling in company. As soon as I reached Rexaul, I gave information to the Prince over the telephone. Through some officials he made all the arrangements for my stay. After staying there for 2 or 3 days, comfortably, I continued the journey by rail. The railway line was there for nearly 100 miles (160 km) more. After that one can go by bus. The last 20 miles (32 km) had to be covered on foot. One can also travel in a "Daandee" carried by 4 persons. The Prince had also sent a person to escort me. Going by Daandee, I reached Nepal one evening. The Prince was expecting me there, along with his friends. He sent me by his car for stay in an Ashram about 2-3 miles away (3-5 km).

415. Heavy materials like motor cars etc are moved from the railway station near Nepal to Nepal by a ropeway. (Please See the Sketch)



416. Nepal is a tableland, plain. It is convenient to move around by car along roads. Most of the people are poor. Only persons belonging to the royal family live in good buildings. It is only they who own luxury items like motor cars etc.

417. I spent the night in the Ashram comfortably. The next day the Prince himself came to the Ashram and took me to the Pasupatinath temple. Thus I was able to get darshan of Pasupatinath also. Several elements of greatness have been attributed to this idol. The idol is not just an ordinary linga as is usually seen in Siva temples. The idol is about 4 feet tall. On each of its four sides as well as on the top, there is a separate face of Lord Siva. The Sanctum Sanctorum has got 4 doors, one on each side. Pujas and other rites are performed on all the four sides. Devotees throng at all the four doors at that time.

418. Is not Paramasiva a five-faced God? I have already mentioned that Pasupatinath here has 5 faces. I append below the slokas in the stotra pertaining to these five faces.....

PASUPATINATHA STOTRAM

*Samvartaagni tadit pradeepta kanaka praspardhi tejorunam
Gambheeradhvani saamaveda janakam taamraadharum sundaram
Ardhendudyutilolapingalajadaabhaara-prabadhoragam
Vande Siddha Suraasurendra namitam poorvam mukham soolinah 1.*

*Kaalaabhra bhramaraanjanadyuti nibham vyaavrttapingekshanam
Karnotbhaasita bhogimastaka mani prodbhinna damshtraankitam
Sarvaprotakapaalasuktisakalavyaakee-rnavakshoragam
Vande dakshinameeswarasyavadanam chaatharvanaabhodayam* 2.

*Praaleyaachalachandrakundadhavalam goksheeraphenaprabham
Bhasmaabhyaktamanangadehadaha-najvaalaavaleelochanam
Brahmendraadimarudganaarchitapadam Rgvedanaabhodayam
Vandeham sakalam kalankarahitam sthaanarmukhampaschimam* 3.

*Gauram kumkumapanka gandhasalilavyaapaandugandasthalam
Bhuvikshepakataakshaveekshan-alasatsamsaktakarnotpalam
Snigdham bimibaphalaadharaprahasitam neelaalakam sundaram
Vande yaajusha vedaghoshajanakam vaktram harasyottaram* 4.

*Vyaktaavyakta nitoopitam chaparanam shattrimsatatvaatmakam
Tasmaaduttaratatvamaksharapadam dhyeyam sadaa yogibhih
Omkaaraadisanaasta mantrajanakam sookshmaadisookshmaat param
Vandeham parameswarasya vadanamkhavyaapitejomayam* 5.

*Sarvathaa yat pasoon paati taischa yabhramate saha
Teshaamadhipatiryascha tasmaat pasupati smrtah.*

Iti Sri Pasupatistotram Sampoornam

419. After finishing darshan and touching of the deity comfortably I started staying in a dharmashala adjoining the temple. All the food items for me were being sent from the palace. Daily conversations and discussions were held on religious matters. I also visited the other famous places there. And thus Sivaratri too passed. Now all the pilgrims were in a rush for getting back. It is not usual for pilgrims to stay there for more

than 7 days without the special permission of the King. I too decided to get back. A royal attendant brought me up to Rexaul. From Rexaul I again reached Lucknow.

420. After spending a few days in Lucknow and Sitapur, I once again reached Vasishtha Guha. In Lucknow I was staying mostly in Shukla Ghat. A rich landlord of Lucknow, one Shri Devi Prasad Shukla, had constructed a very beautiful two-storeyed building on the bank of the Gomati river, as a memorial to his dear departed wife. He became a good friend and devotee of mine. He used to spend his money cheerfully on good things, in good deeds. Everyday religious and spiritual activities used to be carried on in the house. Abhisheka to Siva, puja, chanting of the Gita and Srimalad Bhagavata Parayanam, as also a Gitayagna under my supervision and leadership were conducted with great care, devotion and faith. He had also established an English Middle School. Then he developed it into a High School. I performed the foundation laying ceremony as well as the inauguration of the High school building. Whenever I used to visit Lucknow, I used to visit that High School and speak a few words of advice to the students. Now the High School has grown into a good intermediate college. After the passing away of the founder, it is his brothers who are now discharging that responsibility. Whenever I used to stay in Lucknow, bhajans, Kirtans, Parayanas, Pujas and havans used to be conducted regularly.

421. Back again to life in the Vasistha Guha. The goal of all mankind is to attain incessant joy. This joy resides in nothing else but peace of mind and tranquility. The moment I step inside Vasishtha Guha the mind becomes calm and tranquil. It is for this reason that even if I go far away from this Guha, I rush back to it always in a hurry. Whatever emotions, thoughts or feelings I might be having, the moment I enter the Guha, all of them disappear. It is impossible to say to what a great extent my life in the Guha has conduced to my spiritual upliftment. It is 2 P.M. in the afternoon. I am sitting in a state of meditation inside the Guha. I felt as though I was hearing a voice say: "Now begin for a school" — do something to propagate literacy and knowledge. This area is the dwelling place of unlettered people. Ninety-nine out of hundred among them do not know even to affix their signature. I have mentioned earlier that, even when I started life here, I had started teaching a few children of the locality. Now I have been given this ideal also. I came out of the Guha. At that time there were some persons there who were interested in me. I explained my idea to them. However their reaction was: "Without the active help and co-operation of the people here, it is impossible to start a school here, so please give up your idea". So saying they thoroughly discouraged me.

422. I had understood quite well the mentality of the local people. Not only can no help be expected or would be forth-coming from them, but what is worse, one

would have to incur their hostility and displeasure. They do not have the least desire to get their children educated. Their main vocation is agriculture. It is very difficult to do agriculture properly in this hilly terrain. If the children are sent away to the school, then who will do all the work? Here every one possesses land fit for cultivation. As all the land is the property of the king, the villagers who till the land and who feel as though they own it, have no right of selling away the land. Nobody here starves for want of food. Everyone cultivates the grains he needs. Wheat, paddy, pulses and lentils, vegetables etc are grown here. They depend entirely on the rain-god for their agricultural needs. Should the rains fail, the area used to come under the grip of famine. But nowadays, since roads have been laid, in critical times, the Government sends the necessary food items from other areas by road.

423. It was in such a place that I got the "inducement" to get a school established. I tried my best to desist from this endeavour but did not succeed. On the other hand, the more I tried to abandon the idea, the more did it gain strength and goad me. Why labour the point? For achieving this objective, the very next day I reached the Raj Bhavan in Narendranagar. The then King, Sri Narendra Shah, used to know me well. There is a beautiful building, about a mile (1½ km) away from the Guha, on the bank of the Ganga, for the use of the Maharaja whenever he used to visit this area. He would also come and see me in the Guha whenever he used to come to that bungalow. I discussed with him regarding the proposal to establish a School. He agreed to establish

a primary school. And ere long a Tehri Government Primary School was established there.

424. I experienced considerable relief. But soon, under pressure from some leading persons there, I started corresponding with the Tehri Government regarding the establishment of a Middle School there. Orders were passed that if we could get a building constructed for the purpose on our own, the Government would accord permission for a Middle School. They also sent me the plan for the building. We started collecting funds. Some money was collected without too much effort. We also got from the Government the timber needed for the building. After collecting construction materials such as cement, lime, iron rods etc, construction work began. In three months, a hall and a room on either side of it, were more or less ready. What remained was doors and windows, verandah, and plastering. The Middle School has begun to function. In the Primary School building itself, classes 6,7 and 8 were begun. The Government also appointed 3 teachers. All the money collected has been spent and so the work was suspended temporarily. My body also became very weak. Owing to the recurrence of the pain in my legs, I could not walk as much as was needed.

425. Now what is to be done? Thinking, let this body perish, I was compelled to go away from the Guha. For some days I stayed at the Ramakrishna Ashram at Hardwar, undergoing treatment. From there via Delhi and Madras, I proceeded to Kanchipuram and stayed in the Narayana Seva Ashram for a month or two.

When I underwent ayurvedic treatment such as Pizhichil and Kizhi, I got some relief. From there I went to Kalahasti and worshipped at the famous Siva and other temples. When I was staying there comfortably, all of a sudden I got a telegram: "Badly ill come soon", Shri R.C. Shukla M.B.B.S. is a long-time friend of mine. Even when he was studying in the Middle School in Lucknow, he used to come to me regularly. He has come to the Guha also several times. He is a person with a special devotion towards me. As soon as I got his telegram, I gave up all other thoughts and plans and started immediately by rail for Nagpur. This was in 1949. He was waiting in the Nagpur station. He looked to be very ill. We reached his house. His wife and two sons are staying with him. Hearing about his illness, his father too has come there. All of them were totally nonplussed. He is a Principal Instructor in a Medical School in Nagpur, with a monthly salary of Rs.400 or 500. The disease was a form of epilepsy. They have faith in me. Within 2-3 days of my arrival, he got complete relief. I stayed there happily for a few more days.

426. Now I am receiving letters continuously from various places. I did not wish to return to the Guha. Still, because of the persuasiveness of these letters I reached Lucknow. All my friends there felt happy. From there, I started once again for the Guha. We resumed the construction work in the School building; and students started attending classes in the new building.

427. The year 1950 A.D. is indeed a most memorable one. The fierce struggle for independence by the national organisation under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi, the nation's father; the gaining of Independence for Bharat Varsha by peaceful, non-violent struggle based on "Ahimsa(Non-violence)" without having resort to either arms and weapons or feelings of hostility; was not the year 1950 the one in which we attained full independence? All the independent native states which had then been administering themselves through their rulers, became part and parcel of unified India. The State of Tehri merged with Uttar Pradesh and its ruler remained a King only in name.

428. "*Maalikamukaleriya mannante tholil maaraappu Kettunnathum Bhavaan*" (This is a quotation from the famous Malayalam spiritual poem entitled "*Jnaana Paana*" composed by the famous Poonthanam Namboodiri and means - "It is but You who, in a split second, bring the King reigning supreme from his palace to the ordinary street like a common man and make him carry a burden on his back". - Tr). An undivided India now became split into two portions. The area claimed by and allotted to the Muslims became known as Pakistan. I do not think it is necessary to describe here the fiendish and devilish acts of terror and violence and rampage and havoc wrought all over Bharata Varsha, particularly in Punjab and in East Bengal. In a moment lakhs of rich land-lords in those areas were forced to seek the streets, begging for their very food.

Things, properties, houses, land, which they took pride in as their own possessions, in seconds came under the control of others. Somehow, bearing unimaginable hardships, they reached partitioned India for refuge. And the Government of India magnanimously gives them shelter and help. I am now in the Guha. There too some refugees happened to come. These persons too, instead of begging, took up whatever work or activity they could and eked their livelihood thus. Mahatma Gandhi had tried his utmost to bring unity and harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims. In the end he too became reduced to a mere name.

429. Work on completing the School building is continuing. The Queen of the Maharaja of Tehri also gave some donation. Almost all the rooms, barring a few ones, and the verandah have been completed. It was possible to construct the building without undue difficulty because of the help rendered by several gentlemen.

430. In 1952 an important official of the Railways took me to Bombay in his saloon. Pandit Hans Raj Nagar was also with me. We reached a very beautiful bungalow in Malabar Hill in Bombay. I happened to stay here for about a month. In the evenings I used to proceed to the beach, take a bath in the sea, rest there itself and then return home. I visited the important temples and places there. I also visited the Sadhus and Mahatmas there. I returned to the Guha via Lucknow.

431. I happened to go to Simla in 1953. There too I stayed for a month. That stay improved my health somewhat. From there, via Delhi, I reached Lucknow. After staying there for some days, I again returned to the Guha.

432. The Purnakumbh in Prayag was in 1953. It is the ancient Prayag which is now called Allahabad. This is a famous place for Hindus. The confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna is here. Mythology has it that the Saraswati River, in an invisible form, also joins these two rivers at this point. It is the point of confluence of the three rivers that is called Trivenee.

433. There are 12 Signs of the Zodiac (Raasis). Jupiter(Guru) takes one year to move from one rasi to the next. The Kumbh in Prayag is celebrated when Jupiter comes into the Makara Rasi (Capricorn). Jupiter passes through Makara Rasi only once in 12 years. Thus Purna Kumbh comes regularly once in 12 years.

At this auspicious time, lakhs of Sadhus, Mahatmas and householder pilgrims come to Prayag for bath in the Triveni Sangam. Dasanami Sanyasis, Vairagis, Udaasis, Sadhus and Mahatmas of these and other religious faiths congregate on the banks of the Ganga and live there in tents or even in the open, engaging themselves in bhajanam and other spiritual and religious pursuits. Prayag has a speciality in the month of Maagha. Householder couples also come here for bath in the Triveni in Magha and camp there. This type of stay where the couples stay in separate huts or structures, imbibing only limited food and engaging themselves in Bhajans, Parayana of sacred texts etc is known as "Kalpavaasa". This type of Melas takes place in Prayag every year. I too have performed this type of Kalpavaasa 4 or 5 times. The bath in the confluence at Triveni is so delightful and refreshing. Many diseases get cured totally thereby. Even on occasions when I had been racked by severe rheumatic pains, the Triveni bath has afforded me considerable relief.

434. This year, the Mauni Amavasya day was a very special day for a dip in the Triveni. Prime Minister Nehru, President Rajendra Prasad, Governor Shri K.M.Munshi and other prominent personalities had also come there on that day. The crowd of Sadhus and pilgrims was very much larger than what had been anticipated. Because of inadequate control and supervision by the Police, thousands of pilgrims met with a tragic end, caught in the terrible squeeze. What had happened was that, if some persons happened to fall down in the pressure of the people, the others who

keep on moving from behind like a surging tide, trample over those bodies and grind them to death, not caring in the least to see whether they are men or women. Several fell into the flood of the river. I finished my bath very early in the morning in the Triveni and came and sat in my place. Many officers such as the District Collector and others were quite well-known to me. There were also 8-10 persons who had travelled with me from Lucknow. This tragic incident occurred at 8 O'Clock in the morning. The supreme being does so many things. "*Ghoratara samsaarsaagarathilninnenne traananam cheytedane taarakabrahmame*" (O the Supreme Being who helps people to cross the ocean of Samsaara! Please protect me from that terrible ocean of Samsaara" - Tr).

435. From Prayag I returned to Lucknow. I developed some kind of fever and pain. My stay was in Shukla Ghat. I was indifferent to medical treatment. Nevertheless all my friends brought various doctors and vaidyas. I became all right within a few days. Sivaratri that year was spent there itself. Travelling via Bareilly, Moradabad and Delhi, I reached Rishikesh and then, going by bus from there, I reached the Guha.

436. In August 1951, I arrived at Delhi from the Guha. I stayed there as the guest of a gentleman for a few days. From there, I suddenly reached Madras. I stayed comfortably in the Sri Ramakrishna Mission for 6-7 days. When I used to go to the beach daily for my bath in the sea, some students also used to accompany me. They used to attend the Ashram daily. Every night, after dinner, they used to have Satsang also. On the way to Madras, I happened to rest for a few days in the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram at Rajamundry. A friend of mine, Shri Ramakrishna Rao, took me to the Godavari delta. This place is very picturesque. There are several coconut trees also here. At first sight it would look like Kerala itself. There is an ancient Siva Temple here. The legend behind that temple is as follows: In olden times, these places were all occupied by dense forests. A poor Brahmana happened to get caught one evening inside the forest. A tiger followed him. The man climbed atop a large Bilva tree and escaped from the tiger. The tiger continued to stand at the foot of the tree, awaiting the man's descent from the tree. The Brahmana, however, spent the whole night, sitting on the tree, chanting stotras and doing japa. With the Bilva leaves he performed archana (puja) also. All these leaves fell on top of the tiger. What the Brahmana saw when the sun rose was not the tiger but a Siva Linga in its place. He climbed down from the tree and worshipped that Sivalinga by offering puja. He apprised the residents of the town of this fact. The people, completely overwhelmed by surprise, visited that place in large

numbers and had darshan of this Sivalinga. They also built a temple there. I felt a desire to stay there for a few days. That did not materialise immediately. From Madras I went direct to the Ashram at Ottappalam. The person who established this Ashram, Swamiji Nirmalanandaji, has also since attained Samadhi. The late Swamiji had spent his last days in the Ottappalam Ashram itself. There is thus a special sanctity for this Ashram. I could stay there only for a night. Shri Kundu Panickar was a person who was most interested in me. He came to know about my arrival at Ottappalam. Immediately his dear son comes to Ottappalam Ashram with their car, to take me to their residence at Cheruppullassery. When I reached there, Shri Panickar, his wife and sons were very happy. I stayed there for 3 days. Kundu Panickar is not an ordinary person. Although he suffered from several bodily ailments, he always kept a smiling face. He is unable even to change his posture or to turn round without help. When he sees me he gets a special strength. He gets up and sits on his bed and stands up on the ground on his own. A Bhagavata Paarayanam was in progress in a nearby Ayyappa temple. At the request of several prominent persons that I should also participate in that function, when I was proceeding to the temple in the car, Shri Panickar also accompanied me. That noble person is now no more. Time annihilates every one, but nobody realises this fact. What can be more surprising or strange than this?

437. From that place, along with Kunjikkaavamma, a great patriot, I reached Ottappalam Ashram by car in

one night. The noble lady, Palaat Parukkutty Amma was a great devotee of Shri Swamiji when he was alive. On the way, I called at that noble lady's house. My friend, Shri Chinmayananda Swamiji, is now staying in the Ashram. He took me to the Swamiji's Poorvashrama. We went mostly on foot after crossing the Bharata puzha. On the way we accepted the hospitality of some noble gentlemen in Paruthippally. I spent a day or two in a temple of the Goddess also. Then the Paaliathu Cheria Achchan took me to his residence. There, in the upper portion of a solitary mansion, I spent 2-3 days comfortably. His daughters were specially proficient in music. I still recall with pleasure the sweetness of their devotional kirtanas(songs). He has also several temples belonging to him. I am going to say something about one of these temples, situated about 3 miles (5km) away. Several persons came to me from that temple and, to the accompaniment of bhajans and music and drums, they escorted me to that temple. Here, any Hindu could do pujas without any regard to caste or creed. It is a beautiful place. After spending a night in that temple, I returned to the Achchan's mansion. Then Shri Damodaran Nair, B.A., B.L., Vakil(Advocate) from Palakkad, took me there. An Ashram by name "Vijnaana Ramaneeyam" had been established under his auspices. Several gentlemen used to come there daily and do meditation and other spiritual exercises. Attached to it there was also a small library. After spending 2 days there, I proceeded direct to Guruvayoor by car. Damodaran Nair, Swami Jnaanaananda and Sadhu Balaramji were also with me. On the way we visited

some schools. We reached Guruvayoor at 8 'O clock in the night. The temple authorities gave us all the necessary help and facilities. After darshan of the Lord and after taking a little food, I rested in a building owned by the temple. Sadhu Balaramji also stayed with me. The others returned by car then itself to Palakkad.

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438. Early next morning, I went to the nearby Mammiyoor temple and had my bath etc there. This is a solitary place. So I had my meditation there itself. Then I had darshan of the deity at Guruvayoor and returned to my place of stay. Many persons came to see me there. Items of food used to be sent to me from the temple itself. The then Manager of the temple was a close friend of Retired Judge Shri Krishnan Nair. Shri Nair had already written to him about me. The Manager fixed up a very good and convenient building close to the temple, for my stay. I stayed there only for 3 days. On two days, in the feeding hall, discourses were given by me on religious matters, at the request of the temple management. On the fourth day, at 8 O' clock in the morning, I left for Trissivaperur (the former Trichur). Kunjikkaavamma, Janaki Amma and Sadhu Balaramji were with me. By 10 A.M. we reached the Ramakrishna Ashram at Trichur. The Chief there at that time was Swami Iswarananda. He was very happy. Attached to the Ashram are a High School and a Sarada Mandir. I visited them all. In the evening, here too I gave some discourses. The third day I started for Ernakulam. After accepting a gentleman's hospitality in Ernakulam, I reached the Sri Ramakrishna Ashram at Vaittila. The Chief there was Sri Puranjanananda Swamiji. This is a beautiful place. The affairs of the Ashram are going on smoothly, there is also a dispensary attached to this Ashram. Here poor patients are supplied free medicines. I gave some discourses here also. Sri Nirvikarananda Swamiji, President of the Kozhikode Ashram, happened

to come (to Vaittila) along with a few gentlemen. In accordance with his wishes, I gave Mantropadesa to some gentlemen while here. Here too I stayed for 3 days comfortably.

439. From Thiruvananthapuram, I used to receive letters very frequently from Swamiji's devotee, Shri Sankaravelil Parameswaran Pillai. His dear wife is also one of Swamiji's devotees. She was lying bed-ridden then. Along with her husband and their two children, she had come and stayed for 6-7 days in the Sri Nirmalalaya near Vasishtha Guha. She is extremely desirous of seeing me; so, one fine morning I left by bus from this Ashram for Thiruvananthapuram. Kunjikkavamma, Sadhu Balaramji and a householder Sri Raman Nair, were also with me. We reached Thiruvananthapuram at noon time. From the bus stand we reached Shri Parameswaran Pillai's residence.

440. I am unable to express in words the happiness of the bed-ridden patient. It was she herself who first saw me. Although bed-ridden, she sat up suddenly on seeing me. At that time Shri Pillai, his two sons and his daughters were there. I had my bath and rested for a while. It was not convenient for all of us to stay there. The persons who accompanied me had come with the intention of proceeding to Kanyakumari. By Pillai's car, we reached the chowltty in Kanyakumari by 9 P.M. The next day was Amavasya (New Moon day). Many people had congregated there for bath in the sea and for worshipping the Goddess. We had great difficulty in securing a place to stay. Here too, with the assistance

of the Executive Officer of the Temple, we got a suitable place to stay. We stayed there for 3 days, having bath and darshan of the Goddess. My friend and class mate, Shri Pravanaananda Swamiji was staying there. He has stayed with me in the Guha too. He too started with me one evening for Thiruvananthapuram. After resting for a while at Suchindram, we continued the journey. When we reached the Thiruvananthapuram bus stand, it was 10 O'clock at night. From the bus stand all of us reached the Ramakrishna Ashram in the city. The Chief there, Swami Tapasyananda, welcomed all of us with great joy and extended all hospitality to us. All the others who were with me left for different places. Only Sadhu Balaramji stayed with me in the Ashram.

441. I then went to the Shri Ramakrishna Ashram at Vattiyoorkaavu in Thiruvananthapuram established by Shri Swamiji and stayed there happily for 2-3 days. This is indeed a beautiful place. A fit place for tapasya. Swami Tapasyananda also came there when I was staying in that Ashram. It was through him that all the expenses of this Ashram were being met.

442. A young person, Srinivasan by name, who had become acquainted with me at the Ashram at Madras, also came to see me at the Vattiyoorkaavu Ashram. Several gentlemen used to come from Thiruvananthapuram town. In accordance with their wishes, I left for the Thiruvananthapuram city, for a few days' stay. I stayed in the residence of Shri Narayana Pillai, Chief Physician of the Dhanwantari

Matham Ayurvedic Oushadhaalaya (Pharmacy). Going to Sri Padmanabha Swami temple, I had darshan of "Ananthasayanam" too.

443. Here, in Thiruvananthapuram, there is a Hindu Religious Library with the name of the ruler Sri Chithira Tirunal. Its Curator was Sri Seshadri, B.A.M.L. I went to the Library and auditorium and gave discourses on two days. Our respected Dr. Tampi is now seriously indisposed. He was then staying in his bungalow in the Thiruvananthapuram beach; his wife was also there, attending on her sick husband with devotion. His son Dr. Kesavan Nair is the present Chief Medical Officer in Thiruvananthapuram. One night I went to his house in the beach and stayed there. Dr. Tampi was the backbone of the Shri Ramakrishna Sangh in Travancore State. He certainly does not deserve to be in this sad state of health. Let God give him peace.

444. Shri M.R. Narayana Pillai, who was one of the most prominent followers of Swamiji, has also ceased to be in this world, leaving behind just a name. Along with Sankaravelil Shri Parameswaran Pillai, I went to his (late Narayana Pillai's) house and met his wife, sons and others. I also accepted the hospitality of some gentlemen. My stay in the Dhanwantari Matham was very happy and pleasurable indeed. From here, I proceeded to Chengannur in the Physician's own car. On the way I visited the Sadananda Ashram also. I then visited Karunakaran Nair's house in Adoor. There I had food etc and rested. I happened to go to the

Ramakrishna Ashram there, where I met Swami Narasimhananda.

445. I reached the front entrance of the Chengannur temple at about 4 P.M. in the afternoon. While I was fixing up arrangements to stay that night there, Vaidyaraj Narayana Pillai arrived at Chengannur by car from Aaranmula, and he took me and party also along with him. After darshan in the temple, I stayed at his house.

446. Vasu Pillai, the son of Pullat Vaidyan Narayana Panickar also happened to come there. The next morning Vasu Pillai took us to his house in Pullat. I stayed there for 2-3 days. I went to the High School belonging to the Vaidyan and talked a few words of advice to the students.

447. One morning around 10 A.M. I reached the Ashram at Tiruvalla from Pullat. Sekharananda Swamiji was the then Head of that Ashram. Niranjanananda Swamiji, Vaageeswarananda Swamiji, Nirvikarananda Swamiji, Dharmananda Swamiji and others were also staying there. Here too I stayed happily for 3 days. I went to the Tiruvalla temple and worshipped Sri Vallabha. The Dewaswam Chief (i.e. head of the department administering temples in Travancore State), Sri Raman Namboodiripad, was acquainted with me while in Thiruvananthapuram. He came to the Ashram and took me to the local Hindu High School. I gave some advice to the students. I had a great ambition to establish a Hindu School and had made great efforts

also towards that end. Now that ambition has been realised through others. From there, Namboodiripad took me to the Chengannur temple. After bath in the Pampa river and darshan of Goddess Parvati and Lord Siva, I returned to Tiruvalla. Accepting Nirvikarananda Swamiji's mother's invitation, I went to Maaveli House. I particularly enjoyed the bliss of the nama-sankeertan which was in progress there. After taking bhiksha there I returned to the Tiruvalla Ashram in the night itself and rested. I also accepted bhiksha at Thevanamkottu Namboodiri's residence. A gentleman by name Sudevan called on me at the Tiruvalla Ashram and accepted the advice given by me to him in spiritual matters.

448. The authority to perform the pujas in the Badri Nath temple is vested exclusively in Namboodiri Brahmins from Kerala. They have also to be brahmacharis so long as they perform the pujas there. The custom is for the Maharajas of Travancore and Cochin, at the specific request of the Maharaja of Tehri, to scrutinise suitable candidates and select and send one of them. These priests were entitled "Rawal", and the honorific title "Rawal Saheb" was used for them customarily out of deference. Govindan Namboodiri who now stays in Talavadi near Tiruvalla in Kerala was one such Rawal Saheb. I became deeply acquainted with him even at Badri. As he wished to see me in Talavadi, he happened to invite me to his residence there. I went by country craft by the waterway. Srinivasan and Sadhu Balaramji were also with me. The Rawal himself had sent the country craft to take me. Leaving Tiruvalla at 3 P.M. one afternoon, we reached Talavadi around 5 P.M. That was the time of floods there and the Rawal's house was completely surrounded by water.

449. The Rawal Saheb was very happy. I spent the night there happily. To speak the truth, that place was inconvenient in all respects, but because of his extremely good heart and his excellent treatment, I forgot everything and remained there happily. The next day after the mid-day meal, I left by river craft and reached the Shri Ramakrishna Ashram at Haripad around 5 P.M.

450. The Chief of this Ashram was Swami Chitsukhananda. Accepting his warm and very cordial hospitality, I stayed there for a day or two. Chitprabhananda Swamiji also treated me with great cordiality. Even in my boyhood I used to visit as many temples as possible. In accordance with this custom, I worshipped Lord Subramanya at the Haripad temple and sat in the Mandapam there and did meditation and japa for some time. Accepting prasada from the temple, I returned at night to the Haripad Ashram along with Swami Chitsukhananda.

451. Harikathas used to be performed even before. But the present day Harikathas have undergone a change in their nature and content. In the Ashram I witnessed a Harikatha performance in which there were also songs and dances by young girls.

452. A little farther away from the Ashram there is a Bhattathiri's (a Malayalam Namboodiri Brahmin's) residence. The Kuzhikkaat Namboodiris of Tiruvalla were very famous. They were called "Tantris" as they were in charge of the tantric rites of certain temples. Everybody used to respect them. One of the Kuzhikkaat Bhattathiris has his residence at Haripad. I went to his residence at his request. I gave several discourses there about the subject of religion. Everyone was happy. The next day myself and the other inmates of the Ashram had bhiksha there.

453. Under Chitsukhananda Swamiji's supervision, in addition to the Ashram at Haripad, there are also two

other Ramakrishna Ashrams, one each at Muttam and Kayamkulam. When I was living in the Guha several persons used to stay with me there from time to time. A young person from Mankuzhi near Kayamkulam was one such person. His name now is Balananda Swami. He has been expecting me for quite some time now. From Haripad Ashram I reached the Ashram at Muttam, where I stayed comfortably for 2-3 days. Balananda Swamiji reached there. And via Kayamkulam Ashram he took me to his place. It was only now that I was able to visit the famous place called Ochira. Balananda Swamiji desired to set up an Ashram at Ochira too. While I was staying thus with Balananda Swamiji, the Chief of the Muttam Ashram came with a car and took me to that Ashram. There too I spent the time happily with all of them for 3-4 days.

454. An incident which happened while I was there is worthy of mention. About 2 O'clock in the afternoon one day, a small boy aged 7 is seen there. The moment I saw him I experienced a special affection for him. The boy too experienced affection for me. At that time certain satsangs were in progress there. Obeying what I said to him, the boy too sat down near me on the floor and started meditating. A special fervour-bliss is to be seen on the face of the boy. He continued to sit like this in this "Jnana" state for about 10-15 minutes. Not only myself but all the persons there experienced considerable joy and bliss. The boy's name was Bhaktavatsalan. His father was a Namboodiri Brahmin from Peria Mana Illam house. He was a teacher in the Government School at Haripad. I went with that boy to Peria Mana Illam

too. They all received me with hospitality. The boy's father was very happy. Although Bhaktavatsalan was a Nair boy, yet there was a special Brahmana chaitanya on his face. Is not his father a Brahmana? Not only that, the people in this household, for generations past, would give their daughters in marriage only to Brahmanas.

"Soodraayaam Braahmanajjatah

Sreyasaa chet vrajaayate

Asreyaat sreyasim Jaatimgacchatyaa saptamaat yugaat

Soodro braahmanataameti Braahmanaaschaiti Soodrataam".

According to this passage in Manu Smṛti, this boy is certainly a Brahmana boy. I explained this fact to the boy's father. I also insisted that the boy be given Gayatri Mantropadesa and his Yajnopaveeta dharana ceremony also be held. His father did not resist my suggestions, but at the same time, he did not have the courage to go against traditional customs and practices. Whatever it may be, there is no doubt that this Bhaktavatsalan is indeed an extremely fortunate boy.

455. From here (Muttam) along with Balananda Swamiji, I reached that famous place Ochira via Kayamkulam. God Almighty who is ever affectionate towards His devotees — what indeed does He not do for His devotees? Here it was that He appeared before the servant of a Brahmana who was devoted to Him in the form of a he-buffalo and patiently carried all the burdens of that servant for him — this story is very famous. I am visiting this famous place for the first

time. I stayed here and there in that place together with Balananda Swamiji for 1-2 days and then returned to the Ashram at Muttam. After staying there for 2-3 days, I proceeded to Chengannur.

456. Some gentlemen had specially invited me to Chengannur. The conveniences available there in such matters as suitable accommodation for stay, water facilities and generally facilities for a comfortable stay, attracted me to Chengannur. I stayed there in a building belonging to the temple for 2-3 days. I went to the temple every day. On some occasions, I gave discourses on spiritual matters. From there I went to Kaviyoor where I stayed at the residence of the famous Parvathi Narayana Pillai as his guest. There too I worshipped at the temple. I also visited the High School there and spoke some words of advice to the students. From there I went once again to Tiruvalla. Shri Maadavana Raman Pillai, Inspector of Schools, took me from Kaviyoor to his house.

457. Balananda Swamiji was constructing a small building for a small Seva Ashram at a place near Kayamkulam; and the construction work has been almost completed. He invited me to perform the inauguration of that Ashram. That was a time when I was valiantly trying to wind up my Kerala sojourn and return to North India. But in deference to his wishes, I once again went via Muttam to the Seva Ashram. Chitsukhananda Swamiji had also specially accompanied me from Haripad. After participating in the inauguration ceremony, the next day I reached Alappuzha by bus. And

then Ernakulam by steam boat, one night. I spent the night in a gentleman's house. The next day I reached the Shri Ramakrishna Ashram at Vaittila which is at a little distance. After staying here comfortably for 2-3 days, I reached Kaladi, the birth place of Srimad Adi Sankara. At Kaladi, now there is a Shri Ramakrishna Ashram and a High School attached to it. The Chief there was Agamananda Swamiji. I was meeting him after a very long time. After spending 2 or 3 very happy days there, I proceeded to the Shri Ramakrishna Ashram at Puthukkad. Here the Chief was Swami Amalananda. I went to that Ashram because of his affectionate insistence. There I gave Sanyasa to one of his disciples. From there again to Trichur Ashram. I happened to tell the Ashram people at Trichur that I would be visiting them again on my way back from Kanyakumari. Iswarananda Swamiji was very pleased at my return. I stayed there for a day or two during which I gave some spiritual discourses also.

458. Many people in Kozhikode were eagerly awaiting my arrival there. Particularly, Nirvikarananda Swamiji had also reached Kozhikode from Trichur. In Kozhikode too I gave some discourses. From there I went to Shri Kundu Panickar's residence in Cheruppullassery. He was eagerly expecting my arrival. After staying there for a day or two, I once again returned to Ottappalam. Kunjikkavamma, Sri Krishnan Nair and Chinmayananda Swamiji were also with me. On the way we also went to the house of Kunjikkavamma. Once that very devoted mother had even come to Vasishtha Guha. One Janaki Amma's house is also near

this place. We spent the night there. The next day was September 8. Close by, the Divine Life Society people were celebrating the birth anniversary of Swami Sivananda. I too participated in that function. From there, I reached the Shri Ramakrishna Ashram at Ottappalam at 10 a.m. in the morning, and rested.

459. The Head of this Ashram was Swami Kailasanandaji. Not only he, but all the others in that Ashram too had compelled me to return to the Ashram on my way back to North India. It was in compliance with their wishes that I had now gone again to Ottappalam. I stayed there for a day or two. It was difficult to get a seat in the train. I could not meet Sukhananda Swamiji on this occasion. He is Chief in the Kanchipuram Ashram. I went there with some young persons. I also went to the Narayana Seva Ashram there. After staying in Kanchipuram Ashram for a day or two I returned to Madras. And then I reached Lucknow by train.

460. I now developed a slight illness. I stayed in the Shukhla Ghat itself, there, for some days. When I regained my usual health, I started for the Guha. I am staying happily in the Guha.

461. *Buddhya visuddhaya yukto dhrityaatmaanam niyamyacha
Sabdaadeen vishayaamstaktvaa raagadveshauvyudasya cha
Viviktasevee laghvaasee yatavaakkaaya maanasah
Dhyaana yogaparo nityam vairaagya samupaasritah
Ahamkaaram balam darpam kaamam krodham parigraham
Vimuchya nirmamah saanto Brahmabhooaya kalpate
Brahmabhootah prasannaatmaa nasochati nakaamkshati
Samah sarveshubhooteshu matbhaktim labhate paraam
Bhaktya maamabhijaanaati yaavaan yaschaasmitatvatah
Tato maam tatvatojnaatvaa visate tadanantarm.
- Srimad Bhagavad Gita - 18th Chapter, Mantras 51 - 55.*

(Meaning as given by the Translator)

In union by purified intelligence, of steady self-control,
Renouncing sound and other objects of the senses,
Rid of all likes and dislikes, resorting to solitude,
In diet spare, in body, speech and mind controlled,
Ever practising Yoga of meditation, firm of detachment,
Free from "Iness" and "My-ness", mightiness and arrogance,
Rid of desire, wrath and possession, become calm,
Such a one is fit to become the Brahman.(51-53)
When one has become the Brahman,
When one is serene in soul,
He neither grieves nor desires,
Equal to all beings, he gets supreme devotion to Me
(54)

By devotion he comes to know Me,
Who and What I am in Essence,
Having thus known Me, into Me he enters. (55)

462. Even when I had first started reading the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, I had given particular attention to the portion extracted above. Vasishtha Guha is a fit place for leading such a life. What can I say about my great good fortune in being able to come here and stay here continuously? It is all God's compassion. Even on those occasions when the mind has impelled me towards sense-oriented acts, it is this Guha that has saved me. It is not that I have not been forcefully directed into wrong paths involving the gratification of the senses. I have not sullied my genital organs in any way which is either unnatural i.e., against nature, or even in accordance with the normal and accepted sense of nature. Is not the entire world running after women for the gratification of sexual pleasures? I do not know anything at all about this subject. Now, in the month of July 1955, I have just completed 75 years of age. Nevertheless age has not touched my heart in the least. When others who are very much younger than me talk to me about their old age — "I have become very old; now what should I do?" When they express their misery like this, I simply am unable to resist my laughter. Despite this age of mine, my heart continues to be still like that of a child! What should I say about Brahmacharya?

"Anumodaamahe Brahmacharyamekantanim
Dharmyam yasasyam aayushyam Lokadvayarasaayanam"

The austere life of a Brahmachari, just like an invigorating ayurvedic rasaayana which rejuvenates, confers happiness and health in both this world and in the hereafter.

463. Notwithstanding all this, the mind has on several occasions, turned to sensual pleasures. But I never had occasion to rub shoulders with persons addicted to sensual pleasures — I must say that all this was due to the compassion of the Almighty. It was in my 18th year that I got the severe attack of rheumatism. Navarakkizhi and Pizhichl were done regularly five times. I had to take ghee, milk and Kashayas every day. Are not all these conducive to nourishment of the senses and the genitals? It was the spiritual texts such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Bhagavatam that enabled me to steer clear without sliding into the path of the senses. Even from a young age, the “Vaasanas” for the senses and the “Vaasanas” for the Lord were undergoing a severe mutual conflict. I had also a deep-rooted desire that I should have great devotion to God. God’s blessings which resulted from this thought and desire were the only things that protected me.

464. I used to carry on prayers, reading of spiritual texts and meditation regularly. I have never spent the sandhya times at morning and evening (i.e. dawn and dusk) without doing prayer and meditation. Even while travelling by train, I used to sit in a corner quietly without talking to anybody and do my prayers and meditation. This has become a habit with me. My greatest ambition was to become God’s foremost devotee.

But now all I desire is that “He should grant me the place of a servant to His devotees’ devotees”.

“Mama Maayaa Duratyayaa” - Are these not the great words of the Lord? Sri Vivekananda Swami has compared Maaya (Delusion) to Rheumatism. When you try to drive away rheumatism from the head, it migrates to the neck; from the neck if you try to drive it away, it goes and resides in the back region. From there, in the hands, legs or feet. You cannot totally and permanently drive out Maya from the system. Although temptations were too many, God’s blessings and compassion prevented me from getting lost in them.

“Dhaavannapyavartaakshah skhalati nakuhachit Devadevaakhilaatman”.

God Himself takes personal care of His devotees at all times. Even when a bhakta(devotee) has to run blindfolded or with his eyes covered with his hands along a path full of holes and trenches, God sees to it that the devotee does not fall into a pit. After all, who am I but an inadequate and insincere, false devotee? When he has looked after even me to this large extent, if one were to have true and total devotion, that person is not a mere human being — but God himself.

“Tvabhaktistu kathaarasaamurtajharaniirmajjanaswayam
sidhyantee vimalaprabodhi padaveemaklesatatanvatee
sadyassiddhikaree jayatyayi vibho saivaastu me tvatpada-
premaprandhirasaardratata drutataram vaataalayaadheesvara”.

(Naaraayaneeyam - 2.10)

465. "Satye na labhyastapasaahyeshanaatmaa samyag
Jñānena Brahmachāryeṇānityam" - Sruti (Veda).

If one should get elevation in the spiritual field, one must possess these four virtues necessarily — Integrity (sincerity); Tapasya (austerity and penance); Samyag Jnanam (true knowledge); and brahmacharyam. To the word "Satyam" the meaning I have assigned (or the manner in which I have taken that word to mean) is "Sincerity" or "the state of being totally free from falsehood or hypocrisy" (Nishkapatabhaava). As I have stayed in various parts of Bharata, I have been able to understand the Hindi language to a very little extent. I have also had occasion, many a time, to read that inimitable composition, Ramayanam by that most divine person, Shri Tulsidas. Shri Tulsi Maharaj (Sri Nirmalananda Swamiji — My own Guru Swamiji) himself has, within my hearing, praised Shri Tulsidas Maharaj's Ramayanam in the most laudable terms. Just as "Upamaa Kalidasasya" so also the alankaras (figures of speech) of Tulasidas Maharaj have a majesty, grace and uniqueness of their own. I give below just one or two examples:

"Raama naama manideep dharu Jeeha dehareem dvaara
Tulsi bheetaru baahiraihu jaum chaahasi ujeearu"

Sense: A lamp placed on the door-step of a room lights up both the outside and the inside. The door to the body is considered to be the mouth. If one places a

jewelled lamp on this pedestal, both the outside of the body as well as the inside get light. This jewelled lamp is the Ramanama — go on chanting the Rama nama — then both outside and inside, everywhere, there will be the light of knowledge — yes indeed the lustre of knowledge.

"Naath na rath nahim tanu padu traanam
Kehi bidhi jitab beeru balavaanaa"

Sense: Vibhishana asks Sri Rama: "O, Master! you do not have the chariot, horses and other equipment necessary for warfare. Ravana is very courageous and strong. That being the case, how will you defeat Ravana?"

"Sunahu sakhaa kahu krpaanidhaanaa
jaheem jaya hoyi so syandanu aanaa"

Sense: Sri Rama, the embodiment of compassion says: "O, friend! The nature of the chariot one needs for getting victory is something different. Please listen to its greatness:

"Sauraj dheeraj-tehi rath chaakaa
Satya seeludrdhu dhvajaa pataakaa
Balvivek dam parahit ghore
Chchamaa krpa samataa raju jore"

Sense: Courage and valour are the two wheels of that chariot. Truth and good conduct are the flagmast and the flag of the chariot. Strength, discrimination,

self-control and interest in the good of others are the four horses. Tolerance, compassion, affection, constitute the strands of the rope which is attached to the chariot.

*"Esubhajanu saarathi sujaana
Birati charma santosh kripaana
Daanu parasu buddhi sakti prachamdhaa
Khar vigyaanu kathina Kodandaa"*

Sense: Worship of the Lord alone is the skilled chrioteer. Detachment is the armour. Happiness is the sword. Charity is the axe. Good intellect is the strong spear. Noble knowledge is the hard and powerful bow.

*"Analu achalu manu thronu samaanaa
samu jamu niyamu sileemukha naanaa
kavachu abhedu bipru guru poojaa
ehi samu bijay upaayu na dooja"*

Sense: Pure and steadfast mind is the bow — control of the senses and mind, discipline, control of anger, these are the arrows. Worship of Brahmanas and the Preceptor, these are unpierceable armour. This indeed is the way for victory, none else.

*"Sakhaa dharmamaya asa rathu jaake
jeetana kahu ena kathahu ripu taakem"*

Sense: O, friend! He who has such a chariot, what difficulty can he have in vanquishing his enemies? In fact how indeed can enemies be there at all for such a person?

*"Mahaa ajaya samsaara ripu jeeti sakala so beeru
Jaakem asu rathu hoi drdhu sunahu sukhaa matidheeru".*

Sense: The enemy who is really invincible is "samsaara", the unending cycle of births and deaths. O, courageous friend! If one has such a chariot, one can effortlessly defeat even this enemy samsaara (Ravana's defeat is a mere trifle compared to this.)

The most compulsive advice given by Tulsidas Maharaj is that one must do everything without the least trace of insincerity or hypocrisy. *"Manukramu vachanu bhajanu drudhunemaa"*. With discipline, one must serve and worship with the mind, through action and in speech. *"Manasyekam vachasyekam karmanyekam Mahaatmanaam"*: great and noble people act consistently (and truly) in thought, speech and deed. Insincerity and hypocrisy are the causes of destruction. I too have tried my utmost to eliminate totally all insincerity from my life.

*"Kaitavam vittubbajikkunnavarkulla
Yogavum kshemavum poorthi cheyyuvaan
Kamsaariyaakunna Paarthante saarathi
Sarvadaa ettamaduthiruppoo —"*

(Sense in English given by the Translator — To completely grant yoga, i.e., attainment of things one does not as yet possess; and kshema, i.e., protection of the things one already has, to those who serve Him with total sincerity without the least trace of hypocrisy, the Lord (Krishna) Parthasarathy who is Kamsa's

annihilator, is ever beside them, just as He steered Arjuna's chariot and also cleared all the confusion in his mind.)

466. In October 1954, at the request of a gentleman, I had been to Prayag. I happened to stay there in a very beautiful house on the bank of the Ganga for about 3 months. That building belonged to Shri Shayam Nath Kak. There every day, religious activities used to take place. Shri I.K. Taamini, a college professor, used to bear almost the entire expenditure. Many gentlemen from Lucknow and other places also used to come and stay there for several days. It was Dr. Taamini's wife who used to take a leading part in Havans, pujas etc. The programme was somewhat like this:

467. From 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. in the morning — Homa, puja, stotras, chanting of the Gita, chanting of the Devi Saptasatee; Lunch at 12 noon; my talks and discourses to people who come to see me, from 4 P.M. - 6P.M. in the evening. Several gentlemen used to come regularly for this. Dr. Taamini used to note down the questions and answers covered during these sessions. I am not covering those subjects here as they will all, ere long, be published as a book. My 76th birthday was also celebrated there itself with great ceremony. I gave discourses at several places in Allahabad. From Prayag I went to Kanpur. There I stayed as the guest of Shri A.K. Watal M.A L.L.B. for 2-3 days, and then reached Shukla Ghat in Lucknow. There I stayed happily for some days; and then, in February I returned to the Guha — Peace — Absolute Peace.

468. From the time I started hearing about Shri Ramakrishna, my mind started becoming drawn to that divine person. I have already stated earlier that I started reading all the issues of the magazine "Prabuddha Keralam" right from its very first issue. I could also perform pujas, japas, meditation etc for 10-12 years in the Shri Ramakrishna Ashrams at Tiruvalla, Haripad and Quilandy. My main object was indeed to gain spiritual upliftment. It was Shri Ramakrishna whom I had adopted as my ideal for that purpose. All the divine nectar of that exemplary person's utterances are the very essence of the Gita and the Upanishads. When I used to ponder over those nectar-like words of his, I always used to experience peace and happiness. These undying and ambrosia-like words of his helped me immensely to model my spiritual life and to give it some sort of a shape, form and direction. I think it was in 1910 A.D. that Sri Swamiji once ordered me while at the Tiruvalla Ashram: "You please compose a poem about Shri Ramakrishna in the form of a song". I give below the first song I composed:

Pallavi

*Sree Ramakrishna saranaagata janapaalanalolupa
maamaka deivame*

Charanas

*Ghoratara samsaara saagara thingennenne
Traananam cheytedane taarakabrahmade*

- Sree Rama

Nitya mallaateyulla vastuvilonninkalum
Ettarutenmanam uttamapurisha
- Sree Rama

Kaama Krodhaadi doshamaakave vedinjunin
Paadabhajanam cheyyaanekane anugraham
- Sree Rama

Sattu chittaanandathileppozhun muzhukiyum
Mathanaayi charippathinethumo bhaagyam mama
- Sree Rama

I happened to compose a few more songs and stotras also later. "Brahma Keertanam" which I composed for the noble mother of Sankaravelil Shri Parameswaran Pillai, has since been published. 3-4 years ago, when I was on my way to Kanyakumari and back, I happened to accept the hospitality of Sri Pulla Vaidyar — There too I happened to sing a song: -

(Jnaana Kummi)

Kalyaana moorthiyaam kaarmukilvarnante
Santaapanaasamaam satcharitam
Chintichu chintichu satgatineduvaa-
nente madikkunnu maalokare
- Ningal Ente Madikkunnu Maalokare (1)

Kaalam Kalayaate Paalaazhimaatinte
Maanasachoranaam Raadhesane
Aapaadamastakam dhyaanichu dhyaanichu
Maana mohaadiye Pokkiyaalum
- Seeghiram Maanamohaadiye pokkiyaalum. (2)

Kilbishamokkeyum pokkuvaanulloru
Siddhaushadham mahat paada seva
Sraddhayai cheykilo chittame thelinjaasu
Bhaktiyum Muktiyum labhyamaakum
- Noonam bhaktiyum muktiyum labhyamaakin (3)
(Another version: "Buddhisaktiyum Muktiyum labhyamaakum")

Kuttikaloppam Manassinnu Suddhata
Nissangabuddhiyum Vannuwenkil
Thattikkalayaamee Samsaarabhaarathe
Pettenu Ningal arinjitenam
- Pettenu Ningal arinjitenam (5)

Koopamandookamaam Jeevithatheppokki
Aakaasatulyam perukitatte
Maanasam enthoru soukhyam labhichidu-
Maayaasamenniye Sarvakaalam
- Ningalkkaayaasamenniye Sarvakaalam (6)

Krishnante Roopavum Leelayum Orthorthu
Krishnanaaythanne Bhavikkavento
Trishnakalellaam nasichitu sarvavum
Krishnamayamaayi Vannukollum
- Sarvam Krishnamayamaayi Vannukollum (7)
- Sarvam Brahmamayamaayi Vannukollum

Klesaikanaasana! Naaraayana! Hare!
Mokshaprada! Madhusoodaneti
Bhaktiye Japikkuvin Sarvarum Santatam
Melkkumel Soukhyam Bhavikkumallo -
Satyam Melkkumel Soukhyam Bhavikkumallo(8)

*Kevalam Bhakti kontonne Labhichidoo
Kesavan Tannute Paada padmam
Aasayaadheesanilaasayellaam vachu
Svasmin Mahimayil Ethiyaalum Vegam -
- Svasmin Mahimayil Ethiyaalum Vegam (9)*

*Kaitavam vittu Bhajkkunnnavarkkulla
Yogavum Kshemavum poorthiyaakkaan
Kamsaariyaakunna Paarthante Saarathi
Sarvadaa Ettam Aduthirippoo -
- Sarvadaa Ettam Aduthirippoo (10)
Kotiyugangalaay Sanchayichidunna
Punyaphalamaneer Martyajanmam
Teduvin Sadguru paadapadmam punar -
Neduvin Sowbhaagya jnaanaamrtam -
- Punar Neduvin Sowbhaagya jnaanaamrtam (11)*

*Koutukamaatmaswaroopam Dharikkuvaan
Mechamaay Naalkkunaal Vardhichenkil
Ullathilettam prakaasichu kaanaavum
Brahmasatyam Jaganmitthyaabhaavam -
- Brahmasatyam Jaganmitthyaabhaavam (12)*

*Kampamillathoru sthaanam Labhichidum
Ghoramaam Bhookampamadhyathilum
Tatvamasyaadiyaam Srautavaakyangale
Tatvamarinjullil Dhyanicheedil - Nityam -
- Tatvamarinjullil Dhyanicheedil (13)*

*Kashtame Kashtame Etranaalo Param
Chithabhramathodalanjirunnu
Sree Guru kaarunyameki Purushannu*

*Nirmalaanandamaam Saantisowkhyam -
- Sree Nimalaanandamaam Saanti Sowkhyam
(14)*

(Translator's Note: This poem was composed extempore by Guru Maharaj. It reveals exquisite literary beauty, the loftiest vedantic ideas, the greatness of devotion and the compassion of one's Preceptor. Readers will note that the stanzas start progressively with the letters "Ka", "Kaa", "Ki", "Kee", "Ku", "Koo", "Kr", "Kl", "Kay", "Kai", "Ko", "Kau" and then again "Ka" and "Ka". The last stanza No.14, is a fond and grateful remembrance of the Guru Maharaj's Guru — Swami Nirmalanandaji — who moulded his spiritual life and to whom this work has been dedicated. The last two lines of stanza 14 mean "It was indeed the Benign and Boundless compassion of the Sri Guru(Preceptor) that gave to Purusha(i.e to Purushothamananda) peace and happiness that are the essence of Pure Bliss(Nirmalananda) — which is a reference to Sri Nirmalanandaji - Tr.).

469. While I am staying at Brahmapuri I also happened to compose a "Nirguna Stotram". I give that below:

OM

*Nirgunoham Nisbkaloham Nirmamoham
Nischalaham
Nityasuddho Nityabuddho Nirvikaro
Nishkriyah
Nirmaloham Kevalohameka evaadviteeyo*

*Bhaasvaroham Bhaaskaroham
Nityatriptaschinmayah* (1)

*Poornakaamah poornaroopah Poomakaalah
poornadik
Aadi madhayaantaheeno Jananamaranavarjitah
Sarvakartaa Sarvabhoktaa Sarvasaakshee
sqsmayaham
Sarvavyaapee madvateeto naastikimchana
kvaapyaho* (2)

*Aanandohamanantoham
Sadroopaschidrasopyaham
Aham Brahmaasmi Brahmaasmi
Brahmaivaaham sadaasivah Om -* (3)

I wrote thus far. What for have I written so much?
— I have felt like this on many an occasion. Now should
I stop here?

*"Alamati vitatairvachah prapanchai -
riyamuchiteha sukhaaya drshtirekaa
Upagamitarasam samam manoanta -
ryadi muditam tadanuttamaa pratishthaa" -
— Yogavaasishtam*

Sense: What is the use of this profusion of words?
The mind should acquire disinterestedness in worldly
affairs. It is only then that one can get firm detachment.
Then the mind, without agitation or problems, merges
happily in the Atman. This type of realisation of the
Brahman is the best and most desirable.

*"Nadhanam najanam na sundareem kavitaam vaa
jagadeesakaamayee
Mama janmani janmaneesvare bhavataat
bhaktirahaitukee tvayi"*

Sense: My mind does not seek a beautiful woman,
wealth, poetry or a noble birth. Let me have as many
births of whatever kind — in each of those, always, O
Lord, may I be blessed with true devotion to Your lotus
feet.

*"Tat te anukampaam prasameekshamaano
Bhunjaana evaatmakrtam vipaakam
Hrdvaagvapurbhi vidadhannavaste
Jeevetayo muktipade sadaayabhaak"*

- (Srimad Bhagavatam, 10th Skandha -
Chapter 14)

Sense : O, Lord! No one is capable of understanding
completely Your full glory and greatness. So, those
fortunate ones who, while continuing to undergo their
"Praarabdhakarmas" without interruption and at the
same time, counting Thy divine compassion alone as
being of paramount importance, offer their body, mind
and speech in Thy service and get immersed in such
service, they alone deserve to be free of this eternal
cycle of births and deaths which constitutes "Samsaara".

*"Maatr devobhava Pitr devobhava Aachaaryadevo
bhava Atithih devo bhava" - Srutih
"Aastaam taavadiyam prasootisamaye
durvaarasoolavyathaa"*

*Nairuchyam tanusoshanam malamayeesayyaa
chasaamvatsaree*

*Ekasyaapi nāgarbhabhaarabharanaklēsasya
yasyaah kshamo*

*Daatum nishkrtimunnatopi tanayastasyai jānanyai
namah”*

*“Gurur Brahmaa Gurur Vishnu Durur devo
Maheswarah*

*Gurus saakshaat param Brahma Tasmai Sree
Gurave Namah”*

“Asato Maa Sat Gamaya

Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya

Mrtyor Maa Amrtam Gamaya”.

*“Aaviraavi mayi Edhi Rudra, yat te dakshina
mukham,*

Tena Maam Paahi Nityam”

Om Santih Santih Santih

19-09-1955.

— O —

Note by the Translator.

Here ends the memorable autobiography of Guru Maharaj, or the story of Divine Compassion, as he chooses to call it. This stirring narration is studded with glowing examples of Divine Compassion which manifests itself at every turn of life. Guru Maharaj has subscribed the date “19-09-1955” at the end of this narration as well as to the ‘Dedication’ of this great work to Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj.

Guru Maharaj decided to abandon his physical body at 10.50 P.M. on February 13, 1961. He entered the Jyotir linga during the “Lingodbhava Muhurta” or in the Second Quarter of the Mahashivratri Night, which is considered to be very auspicious.

The narration ends

.....But the Jyoti remains ever bright and effulgent to guide each one of us in our spiritual journey.

Prostrations unto that Mahajyotih.

Om Santih Santih Santih